

# **Recent Researches in Sikhism**

*editors*

JASBIR SINGH MANN  
KHARAK SINGH

PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

RECENT RESEARCHES IN SIKHISM

*editors*  
JASBIR SINGH MANN  
KHARAK SINGH

Papers  
Contributed at the Religious Conferences  
Held in Canada and the U.S.A.  
(1990)

1992  
First Edition : 1,100  
Price : 150-00

## CONTENTS

Foreword	(v)
Perface	(ix)
Introduction	(xiii)

### SECTION 1 : IDEOLOGY

1.	“Fundamentalism”, “Modernity”: Sikhism A Tertium Quid	Noel Q King	3
2.	An Incomparable Liturgey Sacred Nit-Nem amng the world Religious	Noel Q King	9
3.	Essence of the Sikh Ethics	Avtar Singh	13
4.	The Sikh World-View: Its Idelogical Identity	Daljeet Singh	14
5.	Sikhism : A Miri Piri System	Daljeet Singh	42
6.	Political Ideas of Guru Nanak The Originator of the Sikh Faith	Gurtej Singh	61
7.	Guru Nanak in History of Religious Thought	Kharak Singh	72
8.	Kinds of Knowledge and Place of Reason in Sri Guru Granth Sahib	Gurnam Kaur	91

### SECTION II : METHODOLOGY

9.	An Integrated Methodology for Appraisal of Sources for Sikh Studies	G S Mansukhani	109
----	--	----------------	-----

### SECTION III : SIKH HISTORY

10.	Guru Arjun Dev - The Fifth Nanak An Apostle of Peace	Surinder Singh Kohli	125
11.	The Doctrine of Meeri-Peeri	Jagjit Singh	136
12.	Creation of the Khalsa : A Non-Sikh Indian Literary Perspective	Himadri Banerjee	152
13.	Koer Singh's Gurbilas Patshahi 10: An Eighteenth Century Sikh Literature	Madanjit Kaur	161
14.	The Sikhs and the British - 1849-1920	Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon	173
15.	The Sikh Identity - A Ctinuing Feature	Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon	226
16.	The Sikh Rule and Ranjit Singh	Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon	247
17.	From Ritual to Counter Ritual : A Criical Analysis	Gurbakhsh Singh	273

18. Some Unexamined Assumptions in Western Studies of Sikhism	James R. Lewis	286
19. Sikhs in America : Stress and Survival	Ranbir Singh Sandhu	299
20. In the Company of Lions and Princesses : The Sikh Community in the Canadian Mosaic	Jim Lotz	319
21. The Closing Remarks at Vancouver Conference	Iqbal Singh Sara	330
22. Misrepresentation of Sikhism in Western Encyclopaedias	Kharak Singh	335
23. Need for World Institute of Sikhism	Kharak Singh	359
Appendix I, II, III,		377
Select Bibliography		383

## FOREWORD

Religion involves the spirit of inquiry - inquiry into the innerself. With its well directed aim of discovering truth, religion through the millenia, has been helping man to grow physically, mentally and spiritually and achieve fulfilment. The older civilizations took guidance from religion and tenaciously held to a view, which made it a high adventure of the spirit, a converging life endeavour to realize and grasp the hidden meaning of existence. In the absence of this longing and struggle, the belief of the faithful does not differ from the unbelief of the faithless, and the meaning of that and earnestness which proceeds from an inner hunger can hardly be understood. Religion primarily is a matter of inner experience and not an affair of mere belief, or dogma or conformity, which stifle the spirit of free inquiry. There are two dimensions to every religion, especially to every one of the highly developed world religions-religion as a historically conditioned socio-political expression, and religion as a path to the experience of God, or any value equivalent to it. The first consists of rules and regulations pertaining to the routine living and other social disciplines, besides myths, legends and cosmological theories. These socio-political constituents of a religion demarcate it from other religions. The second dimension consists of the truly spiritual part, with its emphasis on personal morality, worship and adoration and the disciplines designed to ensure the spiritual growth of man. The latter constitutes the essential part, whereas the invariable but non-essential part is also relevant so long as it does not choke the spiritual essence and its growth. Spirituality makes religion not only cultivate a spirit of toleration, questioning, and inquiry in its own sphere, but also foster it in every other department of life. It generates humility, the spirit of self-sacrifice and above all the love for all creation. Religion, says Guru Nanak, spans the true extreme ends-the total indulgence in the world and the total negation of the mundane realities-thus regulating the behaviour of man *parvirati nirvirat*

*hatha dovai vici dharamu phirai raibaria* (GG. 1280).

There is, however, a contradictory obverse of religion. Bigotry, fanaticism and intolerance have affected the human relations. Wars have been waged, crusades have been launched to establish the supremacy of one religion over the other. The innocent masses have been massacred to promote the cause of religion. All these misadventures have clouded the true import of religion.

The ancient civilizations were destroyed by the barbarians bred outside those civilizations. But the modern civilization, if allowed to go the same way, will be destroyed by the barbarians bred within the civilization itself. What can save us from this predicament is a little more of 'Christian love' in our hearts for our neighbours, as Bertrand Russell said, or a little 'more altruism' in the words of Pitrim S. Sorokin. This love comes from the practice of true religion as defined by the authentic spiritual teachers of the world. The testament of the great religious teachers is, that religion creates healthy internal environment which pulls down the walls of ignorance and prejudice with the waves of inquiry and illumination.

Sikhism being prominent among the comity of religions has attracted the worldwide attention of scholars and theologians. The *Guru Granth Sahib* as the mainstay of the Sikh thought gives an insight into the Sikh *Weltanschauung*. The Sikh religion can be understood essentially as a spiritual-cum-temporal force created in order to meet the challenges of all times. Quite a number of scholars have endeavoured to interpret and explain the subtleties and nuances of the Sikh cosmology and Sikh ethics, as well as the growth of its social responsibility.

But unfortunately in the enthusiasm of producing something 'revealing', some Western scholars recently have indulged in inspired guesses terming it as a syncretic faith, an adumbration of a variety of religious strands; and that the militant nature of the Sikhs grew in this religious community after a particular caste group responded to the call of the Gurus and made inroads into the faith. A whole lot of misunderstanding has been created by the questionable approach adopted by these scholars.

The publication of the present volume ironically synchronizes the turbulent times when the Punjab is passing through a critical phase. The papers included in the book were read and discussed in seminars recently held at the Toronto and other

Universities. They remove much of the misconceptions which shrouded the vision of the baffled scholars. The basic issues pertaining to the growth of Sikh consciousness, temporal and spiritual Sikh peculiarities and above all the historical compulsions which motivated the search for Sikh identity, have all been objectively argued and analysed, of course with the sympathetic consideration for other religious traditions. I believe this book of considerable merit would be of immense use for the students and scholars of religion and history.

Punjabi University  
Patiala  
13 July, 1992

H.K. MANMOHAN SINGH  
*Vice-Chancellor*

## **PREFACE**

The initiative for the seven Conferences held in UK and North America in November and December 1990, came during a discussion between Dr Jasbir Singh Mann of the Sikh Community of North America and Dr Darshan Singh and S. Balbir Singh Nijjar, President and Secretary respectively, of the Canadian Institute of Sikh Studies, Toronto, while Dr Kharak Singh of the Institute of Sikh Studies, Punjab was in Canada on a private visit. S. Kuldip Singh Chhatwal and S. Bhupinder Singh Sarkaria of Waterloo were among active supporters of the proposal. Simultaneously, the idea was also taken up by Dr Pargat Singh, Dr Baljit Singh Bagga and Dr G.S. Mansukhani, President Secretary, and Member, respectively, of the Sikh Council of Education, UK. The proposal was welcomed by Dr Gurbakhsh Singh Gill, the Roving Ambassador of Sikhism, and leading Sikh Organisations in North America. Accordingly, the President, S. Satnam Singh, and Secretary, S. Jasbir Singh, of the Canadian Sikh Study and Teaching Society, Vancouver, Dr N.S. Kapani and Dr Sabharwal of the Sikh Foundation USA, San Francisco, S. Harjit Singh, Gursharanjit Singh, S. Balwant Singh Hansra, and S. Pritam Singh of the Sikh Religious Society, Chicago, Dr Rajinder Singh Bajwa, Dr Rajwant Singh, S.G.S. Ahluwalia and S. Amrik Singh, of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Washington DC, and S. Jatinder Singh Sabharwal, President, the Sikh Cultural Society, New York and Dr Satnam Singh Dhami of the Tristate Area Sikh Society also joined the other organisations to hold International Conferences at Vancouver, Berkley, Chicago, Washington DC and New York. At their instance the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, made a choice of the subjects and the related scholars, with speciality in those fields for addressing the seven Conferences. It is our pleasure to convey gratefulness on behalf of the nine organisations mentioned above to the organisers and helpers who have with their labours made the Conferences at each place a success.

We also take this opportunity to profusely thank all the



contributors and hosts who have funded the Conferences and offered generous hospitality to the scholars and other participants.

We should like to convey our special gratefulness to the scholars who have very kindly contributed their papers at the Conferences mentioned above. Our deep thanks are also due to Dr Hugh Johnston, Professor of History, Simon Fraser University of RC., Dr Newman, Principal Harbhajan Singh, Kirpal Singh Sirha, Lou Singh Khalsa, S. Kuldip Singh Channi, who contributed their papers at the Conferences, but for one reason or the other could not send their revised contributions.

The papers were appropriately divided for publication in two volumes, this one mostly of papers read or contributed in North America, and the other of papers received for the London Conference. Our particular thanks are due to the Editors for their long and hard labour in obtaining, and editing the material. It has indeed been a labour of love in furtherance of the cause that is dear to our nine Organisations. We would be failing in our duty, if we did not thank S. Manohar Singh Momi for his honorary organisational and secretarial work for the publication of the two volumes.

We are deeply grateful to the Members of the Institute for their generous help in the organisation of the Conferences and the publication of the two volumes.

On behalf of the nine organisations it is our pleasure to express our sincere and deep gratitude to Dr HK Manmohan Singh, Vice-Chancellor, Punjabi University, Patiala, for his keen interest in this academic venture involving publication of the volume comprising the North American papers. In this regard our thanks are also due to Professors Jodh Singh and Balkar Singh of the Punjabi University Patiala, for their valuable suggestions.

Lastly, and importantly, we should like to express our gratefulness to Dr Hazara Singh of the Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, for his invaluable guidance and help in the publication of the papers. In fact, the speed with which the publication has come out, and the quality of it are mainly due to his expertise in the field.

The Editors have indicated the objectives of organising the various Conferences, and the reasons for the choice of subjects of the papers contributed. It is our pleasure in offering these publications for the scholars and the reading public in India and abroad. We hope that these papers will contribute towards

projecting an authentic image of Sikh religion, history and institutions, and in creating better understanding of Sikhism, especially in countries abroad where Sikhs have settled.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to all the organisations mentioned earlier and the Sikh Sangat of the various cities and areas for their liberal contributions, enthusiastic cooperation and participation in the Conferences to make them a success. Our sincere thanks are also due to Dr Satinder Kaur Mann, Dr Datar Singh Sodhi, Dr Amrit Singh Sekhon, Dr Piara Singh and Sardar Rajinder Singh Walia for their very generous contribution for the holding of the six Conferences in North America.

*October 1, 1991*

Maj. General Mohinder Singh (Retd.)  
MVC, MC.

President  
Institute of Sikh Studies,  
Chandigarh

## **INTRODUCTION**

After the Punjab Crisis of early eighties, there has, in the West, been a growing interest in the Sikhs, their religion and history. This interest has especially been keen in countries where Sikh migrants have settled. Unfortunately, the meagre literature that has since appeared, including that from academic circles in the West, has mostly been of a journalistic level, far from being well-researched. Second, the publication in 1989 of the papers of the Conference on Sikh Studies, held by the 'Sikh Community of North America', at Long Beach, California State University, has created further demand from Sikh Organisations in UK, Canada and USA for an authentic projection of Sikhism and its history. Third, with the increasing erosion and confusion in the moral life of modern cultures serious scholars of religion would like to know what is the stand of Sikhism on this important issue.

In this context, the Sikh Council of Education, UK, the Canadian Institute of Sikh Studies, Toronto, the Canadian Sikh Study and Teaching Society, Vancouver, The Sikh Students Association of U.B.C., Vancouver, The Sikh Association of S.F.U. Vancouver, The Sikh Foundation U.S.A. San Francisco, The Sikh Community of Chicago, Guru Gobind Singh Foundation and Guru , Nanak Foundation, Washington DC, the Sikh Cultural Society, New York and the Sikh Community of the Tri-State Area, New York, approached the Sikh Community of North America, Los Angeles, and the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, for organising Conferences of Sikh Studies under their auspices.

Accordingly, the two organisations concerned deliberated over the matter, made a choice of subjects relating to the Sikh Ideology and history that were both topical and needed elucidation, and approached specialists to write papers on them. Scholars from all areas and countries were invited to attend and participate in the Conferences.

A series of seven Conferences was organised to meet the demand. The first Conference was held at London (Essex hall), on

the 17th and 18th November, 1990. The papers contributed at this Conferences form a separate volume. The second Conferences was held at the University of Toronto, Wallberg Building, St. George Campus, Toronto on the 24th and 25th November, 1990. The third Conference took place at Vancouver in the Old Auditorium, University of British Columbia, on the second December, 1990. The fourth was organised at the Berkley University, on the 5th December, 1990. The fifth one took place at Chicago, on the 6th December, 1990. The venue of the sixth was the George Washington University, Washington DC, on the 8th December, 1990, and the last Conference was held on the 15th December, 1990 at New York. These Conferences have been the biggest ever academic event in the field of Sikh Studies. Over forty papers were contributed. The number of those who participated and discussed them fruitfully was about two thousand. Scholars from different disciplines and parts of the world presented their papers, and many of them addressed more than one Conference. At Vancouver messages were received from Mr. William N. Vander Zalm, Premier of British Columbia, and Mr. Garry Weiner, Minister of Multi-culturism and Citizenship, British Columbia. Dr Dennison Moore, Chief of Staff, Multi-culturism, who brought the message, addressed the Conference. (For messages see Appendixes I and II).

The papers contributed at the Conferences in Canada and USA, and received after revision have been divided into four Sections, namely, Ideology, Methodology, Sikh History, and General. The present Volume comprises 23 papers. The second Volume, entitled Fundamental Issues in Sikh Studies, contains 18 papers mostly read at the London Conference.

In recent years there has inexplicably been a tendency to choose current issues, and rush to the press, even where the available information is inadequate. True, there is no bar to taking up current issues, provided opinions are based on sound information and are honestly held. But, doubts on this score are natural to arise, when views expressed are far from well-founded. For example, there have been a spate of books and papers including those from academic circles about the Punjab problems. The paper (published in the London Volume) on the water dispute, which forms the hub of the Punjab problem, shows that not one of those publications or papers mentions even the barest facts of the issue, much less its historical or constitutional aspects. Hence merely calling 'wolf', 'tragedy' or 'disaster' or the expression of

drawing-room talk cannot be a substitute of presenting a sound factual statement or analysis. The difficulty of producing an objective statement about current affairs by an academician is well recognised and understood. Therefore, except for papers seeking to dispel the confusion created by some hasty observations, we have refrained from taking up current topics. Besides, as emphasized already, it is probably more fruitful to understand the present by a thorough study of the past, instead of following the inverted process of putting the cart before the horse, and reconstructing the past as a projection of the fluid present. Apart from the difficulty of the task for the academician, the finding sometimes could be quite subjective or misleading. For, writing current history, however tempting, is the preferred task of the journalist and not so much of the academician. The papers of King, Kharak Singh, Dhillon and Daljeet Singh, in the two volumes expose the hazards of making such attempts about current matters.

A word about another misapprehension in some circles. Neither the use of the 'Western' nor of the 'Modern' critical method is unwelcome. It is the lack of it or some substandard works which are the lament. Kharak Singh's paper shows how inadequately authenticated are most of the entries about Sikhism in Western encyclopaedias. And yet no one has been able to bring them upto the mark or even uptodate, showing thereby, the paucity of scholarship regarding Sikhism. Over-dependence on the views of ex-missionaries, naturally conditioned by their profession, or sporadic visitors to India, cannot obviously be of any great help or merit.

There is an important fact which needs to be stressed about Sikh studies. The Sikh Gurus clearly state that the hymns in the Guru Granth emanate out of their spiritual experience. The lives of the Sikh Gurus clearly and profoundly give expression to that experience and the thesis it conveys. It is, therefore, logically and ideologically a contradiction to divorce the study of Sikh history from a study of the Guru Granth and its theology. We do not for one moment suggest that historians, sociologists and anthropologists should not study Sikhism from the point of view of their respective disciplines. Even among them there are in each discipline, two kinds of interpreters: those that accept the existence of a fundamental Spiritual Reality, and those that do not and interpret every thing from the materialist point of view. So far as scholars who believe in religion or have some religious faith, are

concerned, their stand on the issue of religious history is well known. It is true that there are historians, sociologists and anthropologists who would like to study a religion purely from the materialists point of view, and for that matter, have no obligation to accept the source or validity of a scripture or its ideology. But, to the ordinary reader and the scholar they owe an obligation to state the extent of their limitation, the scope of their vision and the lens through which they view it. For example, a historian like Toynbee who accepts the value of spiritual experience observes, "They (Prophets) are not the product of their social milieu; the events that produce them are encounters between the human beings and the Absolute Reality that is in, and at the same time, beyond all the phenomena of Existence, Life, and History; and any soul may meet God at any time and place in any historical circumstances. Nevertheless an examination of the social milieu will help us to understand the nature, as well as the rise, of religions in which this experience of meeting God is communicated and commended to Mankind as the inspiration for a new way of life."

In this context, we make no apology for emphasizing the inalienable connection between a study of the Guru Granth and the lives of the Sikh Gurus, and the study of the development of their religion. Hence the consequent necessity of correlating the two studies. But, we do not any time exclude the possibility of the study of religion and its history from the point of view of the materialist, except for the need of disclosing the ideological stand of the author.

In this volume, on Ideology King has contributed two papers: "Fundamentalism, Modernity: Sikhism A Tertium Quid" and "An Incomparable Liturgy: Sacred Nit-Nem among the World Religions". In the first paper he makes a close study of the Sikh doctrines and explains how misleading it is to brand them as fundamentalism, a word drawn from the Christian background, suggesting rigidity, primitivism and anachronism, or to call Sikhism a peasant or Jat society. He makes a penetrating analysis of the post-modern situation that has led to certain revivalist movements. Actually, the problem is that there are visible cracks in the modern culture, threatening deterioration and disintegration in its societies; and correspondingly there is a tendency to turn to religion as a means of "survival, recovery and resurgence." In fact, we feel that further the veil over the Russian Empire is removed, the greater would be the disillusionment with the so-called modern view of history. So far as the Sikh society is concerned, King feels,

it has been “the continued unfolding of enseeded, encoded nature of Sikhism as propounded by the First Mahalla and the other Nine. “Referring to the Sikh society, both in the nineteenth century and in the present times, he writes, that it is nothing beyond invoking or working out of the original teachings of Guru Nanak, emphasising the brotherhood of man in the classic words that there is “No Hindu nor Mussalman”, but only man. He observes that Sikh scholars thoroughly grounded in their own inheritance, may in due course contribute much to a genuine theory of world history.

It is with deep lament that we record the sudden and sad demise of Dr Avtar Singh, the outstanding exponent and scholar of Sikh Philosophy. His passing away is an irreparable loss to the world of Sikh scholarship. It is unfortunate that the shocking happening took place, before he could send his revised papers to us. We are, therefore, including only the abstract which he had sent to us for advance circulation. It contains an extremely important observation, namely, that it is the Sikh ethics and Sikh Philosophy that form the fundamental context that gives rise to Sikh history and social development, which cannot be understood and appreciated without reference to the core, which is the fount that gives life, strength and drive to them. He writes “This confusion results into invitation to the sociologist, anthropologist and some historians to continue talking about identity without reference to the ethical core which is the inner element. The results range from genuine confusion to intentional misleading of Sikhism.”

Daljeet Singh has contributed two papers on Sikh Ideology, “The Sikh World-view: Its Ideological Identity” and “Sikh Religion and Politics”. In his first paper he explains that the Sikh thesis is based entirely on the spiritual experience of the Gurus. He classifies world religions into four categories, and considers all Indian religions before Guru Nanak to be dichotomous or life-negating, in the sense that they make a clear division between the spiritual path and the empirical path, with the religious person owning monasticism, Sanyasa, celibacy, or withdrawal from empirical life. In the second category, he places Judaism and Islam, which started as whole-life religions, but in which withdrawal and dichotomy appeared later in their history, in the form of cults like those of Essenes, Kabbalists, etc., in one case, and of Sufism in the other case. He places Christianity in the third category, being virtually in line with the views of Jeremiah, who recommended non-resistance to the evil of Babylonian invasion. Therefore, despite the

fundamental of treating 'your neighbour as yourself', Christian pacificism has led to religious withdrawal and the appearance of monasteries and nunneries from the end of the Third Century A.D. It is this other-worldliness in the Christian Society that historians like Gibbon and Sir James Fraser, have considered to be a cause of the fall of the Roman Empire. The Reformation, he indicates, dealt a blow to the supremacy of the Church, which became virtually a subordinate wing of the national state. This dichotomy ultimately has given rise to the phenomena of Secularism, Communism, Individualism, and Consumerism, causing increasing erosion of the moral fibre of modern societies. In the context, he highlights the independence and whole-life character of the Sikh World-View, which apart from being optimistic, seeks to ensure that Sikhism, like Judaism does not turn into withdrawal, or a salvation system. In order to avoid this decline, 'the Tenth Master has prescribed the keeping of *Kirpan*, which is, on the one hand, a constant reminder to the Sikh, of his social responsibility, and on the other hand, a warning against escape to monasticism or other-worldliness. In the other paper he brings out that the *miri-piri* doctrine is fundamental to the religious experience of the Gurus and the system of Guru Nanak. While in the Indian context this doctrine is entirely new and original, it forms an integral part of all whole-life religions that combine the spiritual and the empirical components of life. The author traces how, in pursuance of the needs of the doctrine and the times, each Guru systematically contributed to the development of the Sikh Panth from the period of Guru Nanak to the end of the seventeenth century, culminating ultimately in the creation of the Khalsa. He concludes that all misunderstandings and misrepresentations about Sikhism are due to the failure of some scholars to accept the *miri-piri* doctrine as an integral part of a whole-life system, and their insistence to interpret and view Sikhism through the glasses of their own beliefs and philosophies.

Gurtej Singh's article "Political Ideas of Guru Nanak the Originator of the Sikh Faith", has brought out with clarity the political concerns of Guru Nanak in his ideology and life. He has referred to two groups of outside scholars. The first group, he states, although they cannot fail to note the socio-politically oriented hymns of Guru Nanak, always appear to be anxious to include him within the framework of their pacifist formulations. The second group led by Cunningham, who was the first to doubt



the veracity of earlier observations, perceived the wide import of the teachings of Guru Nanak, as applicable to every state of life and every condition of society. Guru Nanak emphasizes that in God's order a ruler working without regard to universal values and justice, should have a fall, and that under certain circumstances it is more honourable to resist and die than to live under an immoral and tyrannical rule. This is the call Guru Nanak gives to every lover of God, when he asks him to be ready to sacrifice his head on the path of love. The Guru, he says, firmly believes that no individual can tread the spiritual path without fulfilling his value-based role in the relationship with society and socio-political organisations. For Guru Nanak the path to spiritual fulfilment is through right conduct, including that in the socio-political field, incessant striving, rigorous discipline and God's grace.

Kharak Singh in his paper "Guru Nanak in the History of Religious Thought" recounts the essentials of the Guru's life-affirming ideology that accepts the reality of the world. He emphasizes that it was Guru Nanak who rejected asceticism, ahimsa, celibacy and withdrawal from life, and founded a society of householders with the social responsibility of ensuring justice and equality between man and man, man and woman, and in the sharing of wealth. Again, it is Guru Nanak who has laid emphasis on deeds and the necessity of resisting injustice and oppression in the socio-political sphere. In this context, he shows how inadequate and erroneous is the understanding of Surjit Hans in his book "Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature". He finds his translation of Guru's hymns faulty, and consequently his interpretations unreliable. The paper furnishes an objective lesson as to how risky it is for social scientists to rush to the press without sufficient understanding or knowledge of Gurbani, its idiom and world-view.

As a teacher of Sikh philosophy, Gurnam Kaur analyses the three kinds of knowledge, namely, perceptual knowledge, rational knowledge, and intuition, accepted in the Guru Granth, and how the Gurus have stressed the need of integrating them for living a fuller spiritual life, while giving primacy to the role of revelation. They accept the use of reason for fruitful activities of the seeker. She concludes that the Sikh Gurus emphasize that the Sachiaara, the true man, in consonance with the altruistic Will of God, is fully "Conscious of his social responsibilities and utilises his knowledge for the development of the human society."

As a distinguished scholar of long standing, G.S. Mansukhani is critical of the Western historical method. For, it fails to take into account the important sources of oral history, tradition, the Sikh value system and Gurmat. The sanctity and importance of Gurmat (the Sikh doctrines in the Guru Granth and the injunctions of the Gurus) are so fundamental that no Sikh could ever think of violating them. It is because of such ignorance of Gurmat that while the Sikhs in the early Eighteenth century have laid down their lives to maintain their hair, a Western scholar seeks to deny the injunction and, instead, traces the origin of the practice to an old tribal custom. Mansukhani stresses the need to study Gurmat and Sikh values so as to avoid such pitfalls.

Kohli gives a biographical account of Guru Arjun Dev, indicating his landmark activities. In compiling the Sikh Scripture he exhibited a unique vision, thereby eliminating permanently all future controversies that could arise regarding Sikh doctrines or the text of the *bani*. Similarly, he started the institution of Daswandh which has since cemented the cohesion of the Panth as a distinct society.

Jagjit Singh delineates the historical expression of the Miri Piri doctrine. While indicating that this component is fundamental to the system of Guru Nanak, he shows how each Guru took significant and specific steps to create new institutions and to build and prepare a society that should be able to discharge its socio-political responsibilities as envisaged by the First Master. His account dispels the simplistic notion that the Fifth Guru was a pacifist. For, he explains that it was he who created 'a state within a state' in his time and it was this political build-up which aroused the ire of the emperor Jahangir, who ordered his execution in order to destroy the political potential of the Sikh Society. He adds that even sociological studies of Weber and others clearly envisage overt political activities by some religions that are neither pacifist nor monastic. On the basis of the multifarious steps Guru Arjun took, he concludes, that more visible and logical. political developments took place in the time of Guru Arjun than in the period of the Sixth Master, who followed his father's instructions.

Himadri Banerjee gives a synoptic description of how the creation of the Khalsa has been viewed in the non-Sikh Indian literature, especially in the Hindi, Bengali and Oriyan publications. By and large, he finds that the Sikh history of the period has received approbation of the scholars of those areas. Banerjee

unfolds a healthy and meaningful perspective recounting how the interest and activities of a minority were viewed in the early part of the century, compared to the tension-borne and competitive electoral politics of the present day.

Madanjit Kaur in her paper entitled “Koer Singh’s Gurbilas Patshahi 10’ : An Eighteenth Century Sikh Literature”, makes a detailed analysis of the dating of this writing, and comes to the conclusion that Surjit Hans’s view, in contradiction to the findings of Bhai Vir Singh, Fauja Singh and Shamsheer Singh Ashok, is untenable. She has examined, one by one, all the arguments adduced by Hans to call Koer Singh’s work a nineteenth century production, and finds them to be frivolous, especially in the face of the clear recording of the date which synchronizes with all internal evidence of the book.

Dhillon’s paper “The Sikhs and the British” gives a clear picture of how the British had been taking every step to ensure the destruction of the ideological and the political base and strength of the Sikhs. His account disproves the journalistic notions held by persons like Barrier, Mcleod, Kapur and Oberoi, that the British were interested in advancing the political strength or identity of the Sikhs. This well-researched paper shows how easy-going scholars who adopt politically-current or convenient notions, often tend to create unsound history.

The author’s second paper is a case study of Oberoi’s paper ‘From Ritual to Counter-Ritual’ read at the Toronto Conference in 1987, wherein he asserted that, while in the earlier four hundred years the Sikhs had no separate religious identity, it was created by the Singh Sabha in the late nineteenth century. Dhillon’s analysis shows that Oberoi’s suggestion made at Toronto, is too superficial to be sustained either historically or factually.

This paper highlights the need of multi-disciplinary approach for the study of complex socio-religious issues, and the difficulty of scholars trained only in one discipline to produce any sound or worthwhile study.

Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon’s paper, “The Sikh Rule and Ranjit Singh” is a historical appraisal of this period. It makes a comparative study of how human, liberal and tolerant was his administration, and how it successfully inspired the confidence and respect of all communities in the state. His analysis reveals that the level of his administration in this period in all fields was higher than the rule of his contemporaries in the country and outside it.

This, he concludes, was due to the fact that Sikh ethos primarily governed both his functionaries and the people. It is remarkable that despite the persecution of the Sikhs under the Moghal administration, there was never an exhibition of sectarian prejudice or conversions, this being evidenced by the extreme loyalty of his Muslim forces in the Anglo-Sikh Wars.

Gurbakhsh Singh Gill's paper is a rejoinder to a paper "From Ritual to Counter-Ritual-Rethinking the Hindu-Sikh Question 1884-1915", written by H.S. Oberoi. The author argues that identity of a religion does not depend upon the language, territory, dietary taboos, festivals or a few cultural traits. Quoting extensively from Gurbani, he recalls a number of features of the Sikh faith, like its view on time and space, pollution, purity, Varanashram, rituals, attitudes towards the world, etc. which lend to Sikhism an identity distinct from all other previous religious systems.

In his paper "Some Unexamined Assumptions in Western Studies on Sikhism," James Lewis makes a very incisive and analytical examination of Western Studies to find how most of them suffer from unfounded assumptions about Sikhism, its doctrines and history. He makes a clear and comparative study of different religions and concludes that many of the inferences and formulations of the Western writers, have no basis in fact or history, especially regarding their suggestions about Sikhism being a syncretism, distinction between 'Early Pacificism and Later Militancy', and calling the Singh Sabha revival Neo-Sikhism.

Ranbir Singh Sandhu's paper "Sikhs in America: Stress and Survival" is an extremely clear, thorough and perceptive examination of the problems of Sikhs in North America. Many papers have appeared on various aspects of this problem, but there is hardly a more precise and objective analysis of the issues involved, which takes into account all phases and facets of the problem and its close links with conditions in their home state of Punjab.

In his paper "In the Company of Lions and Princesses", Jim Lotz draws a graphic picture of the problems of the Sikhs in Canada in the developing multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Canadian society with its various tensions and pulls. He is quite emphatic that Canada is developing an ethos of its own, which is communitarian instead of being individualistic, like the American society. Hence Canada, he says, is building a 'Community of Communities' and not aiming at a homogenous social structure.

In his closing remarks, I.S. Sara, at the Vancouver Conference, expresses surprise at persons who are unclear about the Sikh identity, even in the Twentieth century, although in the eighteenth century the invaders had clearly perceived and recorded the separate way and identity of the Sikhs. He also expresses his unhappiness about the performance of the Sikh Chair, the Community had got established at Vancouver.

The book concludes with two papers by Kharak Singh. The first deals with a sample study of entries on Sikhism in over fifty encyclopaedias on religion and history published in the West. Statements therein reveal a some-what disappointing level of knowledge of Sikhism and its Gurus. There are errors of fact as well as misinterpretations of the Sikh doctrines. Guru Nanak has frequently been mentioned as a disciple of Kabir, and Sikhism has almost invariably been shown as a sect of Hinduism. This paper explains why some Western writers on Sikhism, conditioned by their background, have displayed an evident misunderstanding of Sikhism and its history. The paper suggests two lessons for the Sikhs, to make amends for earlier neglect, and to present a well-researched and authentic image of the Sikhs, their religion and history; and for those in the West, interested in the study of Sikhism, to be more patient and thorough in their search for the truth.

As a corollary of his first paper, Kharak Singh emphasizes in his second paper, the need and justification for a World Institute of Sikhism and gives an outline for it. He argues that as a whole-life religion with an optimistic attitude towards life and a goal of carrying out the Altruistic Will of a Loving Creator, the Sikhs owe it to themselves and their faith to present its world-view at the forum of other Higher Religions. The author points out that the damage from the earlier indifference, both by the scholars and the intelligentsia, has been considerable. Efforts made so far, he indicates, have been, although commendable, inadequate. It has been evident that in the field of religious studies work by proxy is not possible. That is why existing efforts have been neither quite fulfillment nor in any sense very serious. Further neglect, in allowing the existing state of affairs to continue, he believes, could be suicidal. Hence his emphasis for the establishment of an Institute/Centre of Sikh Studies and Education with modern facilities for research and publication.

These conferences of Sikh Studies abroad, have brought to

light certain realities about Western scholarship of Sikhism. The papers of King, Kharak Singh and Dhillon, have shown that in the absence of adequate knowledge of Guru Granth and the lives of the Gurus, just segmentary readings of the Sikh society remain very much superficial and out of focus. Similarly Kharak Singh's paper has revealed that the book called *Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature* has been found to be deficient in comprehension and coherence, while dealing with Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. The difference between some of the uni-disciplinary writings and the multi-disciplinary understanding of those issues, is so wide, that it appears necessary that serious scholars take into account the reasons for it, so that future pitfalls are avoided. Hence, our emphasis on the study of Guru Granth. The gap between the understanding of the man of religion and the comprehension of the philosopher who tries to reduce religious truths into a rational and metaphysical framework has always been there. The 'problem arose both with Islam and Christianity. For, Toynbee writes, "Thus any presentation, whether particular or general, of Scientific truth is always precarious and temporary. The difference in character between scientific truth and poetic truth may be summed up as follows: Poetic truth is absolute, because it is in the static time dimension; scientific truth is relative because it is cumulative in the Time dimension. On the poetic level of the subconscious psyche the comprehensive vision is Prophecy; on the scientific level of the intellect it is Metaphysics." It is the fundamental difference between the sources and the roots of the two views that has essentially to be considered before making any hasty or categoric assessment.

In the case of Sikh Studies, there is another important fact which is generally ignored. Indian religions, as also Christianity, because of their ideological compulsions, consider the use of spiritual experiences in the empirical field, virtually to be a decadent diversion. Accordingly, scholars drawn from such a background, seek to comprehend the two courses of life as separate and independent. They make the simplistic assumption that Guru Nanak was another Indian Sant or pious man preaching the path of personal salvation; but they become baffled, when they find that from the Fifth Guru onwards the Sikh society was formally organised and militarised over a period of hundred years by the later five Gurus. Instead of revising their faulty premise and assumptions, they seek to devise artificial environmental grounds

for what appears to them to be a major departure. On the other hand, in the Indian context the Sikh Gurus were the first prophets who consciously and clearly tried to relate spiritual truths and experiences to the empirical life of man, so as to rid him of his egoism and enable him to work in line with the Altruistic Will of God. The Immanence of God in the empirical life is an emphatic truth expressed in the Guru Granth. The essential logic of this truth is its expression in the empirical life of society in the form of total social responsibility and a universal outlook. It is because of the fundamental ideological differences that some scholars are unable to comprehend the natural flow, unity and continuity in the lives of the First Guru and the later Gurus. For, while in pacifist systems the use of spiritual activity for empirical tasks is a fall; in the whole-life system it is spiritually and logically essential for the mission of the prophet. That is also the reason that many a scholar is unable to comprehend the real significance of Guru Nanak's very revealing decision of not making his son, Sri Chand, who represented 2500 years of Indian ascetic tradition, to be his successor, and of choosing instead Guru Angad, a God-conscious householder, to lead the Panth. To the discerning this step clearly disclosed what were the objectives and mission of the Master and what would be the role of the Tenth Master and the future shape of his society.

As the papers and their discussion at those conferences have revealed, we believe, it would be very helpful in any study, whether religious, historical or sociological, if this basic aspect of Sikhism is kept in view.

Considering the scholarly discussion at the various conferences, it is felt that the section on Sikh Ideology has brought out explicitly the doctrinal position of Sikhism and its world-view as a Higher Religion, as also the unity of thought and goals of the Ten Gurus. It has been explained that while the Miri-Piri doctrine is fundamental to Sikhism, why persons drawn from pacifist or dichotomous religions, have sometimes difficulty in understanding this doctrine or accepting it as an integral and logical component of Sikhism, or, in fact, of all whole-life religions. These ideological issues find a systematic treatment in the papers of Daljeet Singh, Gurtej Singh, Kharak Singh and Jagjit Singh, that are based on the Guru Granth and the work of the Gurus. The handicap of some scholars of Sikhism in India and abroad has unfortunately been their inability to make a detailed study of the

Guru Granth and their uncritical dependence on the simplistic assumption that it is a Bhakti system. The question is not whether the Singh Sabha interpretation, or for that matter, any other interpretation of Sikh ideology, is correct, but whether it synchronises with the ideology of the Guru Granth. The incongruity of employing unverified standards of assesment to obtain correct answers appears obvious. Partly the fault is of some modern methodologies that ignore or minimise the role of ideologies or use only undisciplinary approach. Perhaps, the inevitable fall of the Russian Empire in the East and the increasing cracks in the structure of the family in the West may prove corrective of the obsession with the environmental or the Marxian approach. Dhillon and Kharak Singh's case studies demonstrate how un-dimensional studies are sometimes without balance and almost flippant.

The last two papers by Kharak Singh reiterate the rationale of the proposal made at the Conference held by the Sikh Community of North America at the Long Beach University in 1988, namely, the urgent need of setting up a Centre of Research in Sikh Studies. The resolve was formally re-emphasised at most of the Conferences. Organisations in U.K., Canada and USA have set up Committees to put up a coordinated proposal for the purpose. It is gratifying to record that since then a Centre of Sikh Studies with a Library has been started at: 2530, Warner Ave, Santa Anna, Orange County, (CA). U.S.A.

In the end it is our great pleasure to express our gratefulness to all the organisations mentioned earlier, and the Sikh Sangats of the various areas, for their liberal contributions, enthusiastic cooperation, and participation in the conferences to make them a success. Our special thanks are also due to Dr(s) Satinder Kaur Mann, Datar Singh Sodhi, Gurmit Singh Sekhon, Piara Singh and S. Rajinder Singh Walia for their very generous contributions for the holding of the six conferences in North America.

We are particularly grateful to scholars for their very valuable contributions to the conferences.

Jasbir Singh Mann,

Kharak Singh  
Editors



## 1

**“FUNDAMENTALISM,” “MODERNITY” :**  
**SIKHISM A *TERTIUM QUID***  
**NOEL Q KING**

“Fundamentalism” in its strictest technical use refers to a movement within American Protestant Evangelicalism of fairly recent origin. The word has come to be linked with various literalist, evangelical and charismatic groups and televangelists. Thence it has been applied to religious extremists who claim to be returning to fundamentals.<sup>1</sup> We find the media and some scholars using it of the Pire pinis cargo cultists of yesterday in Sepik River, New Guinea, onwards to the *Babri masjid* \ *Ram jaMm bhoomi* folk in today’s India. Recently in his *Defenders of God, the Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age*, Bruce B. Lawrence with great scholarly care and erudition defines terms and deals mainly with what he considers prime examples- American -style Protestant Fundamentalists, the lthna- ashariya Shia of Iran and such defenders of “The Jewish collectivity” as *Gush Emunim*.<sup>2</sup> He refers the movements back to some of the major concepts of modern world history as it has developed since World War I. We will turn back to this shortly.

“Modernity” and “Modernism” refer to a tendency among religions to update themselves by accepting concepts and techniques from the modern secular world around them. The words are sometimes used as a kind of second part in a dichotomy- “Fundamentalism versus Modernity/Modernism”. They easily fit into the academic discussion on the “modernization” of religions like Islam or the influence of modern America of the Third Republic in France on their own Roman Catholicism early in the century.<sup>3</sup> But easily the concepts elide towards association with western dominance and the Great Western Transmutation (abbreviated to GWT) by which the world was transformed between 1492 and 1947.<sup>4</sup>

Here it is necessary for our purposes to interject that the word “fundamentalist” has been applied *to* Sikhism too by both media and scholars especially in the time leading up to and since the tragic Operation Blue Star. Recent examples include Angela Dietrich’s “The Khalsa Resurrected: Sikh Fundamentalism in the Punjab.”<sup>5</sup> In this article which struggles to be sympathetic and respectful, the essay on the Sikhs rubs shoulders with those on Fundamentalist Muslims in West Africa, Iran and Egypt, Secularists in Turkey, Sri Lankan Hindus in Britain, Protestant Tamils in Madras, as well as the American Moral Majority. Again, late in 1989 at a meeting of the American Academy of Religion at Anaheim in California, a panel discussed these issues in connection with Sikhism. A paper which has not to date been published and which requests it be not quoted for it had not been finalized, was read by Professor Harjot Oberoi of Vancouver. It was entitled “Sikh Fundamentalism: Ways of Turning Things Over?”

In the discussion generated it became clear that though a religion which used a *mool-mantra* and was given *to mulvad* obviously got down to fundamentals, the word “Fundamentalist” could, hardly be used in the same way as it was of American Fundamentalists. There was also considerable objection to the way in which by the use of social science and Marxist historical methods it was to be supposed that Sikhs were mainly peasants who were led along by a few people who drew them out from the main body of Hinduistic Indians. The idea was also hotly contested that deep changes in Sikh History from 1699 onwards came in response to outer stimuli on the part of a body in which it was alleged increasingly Jats had taken over leadership from Khatri. If we reject such explanations of evolution into modernity and other similiary based arguments and hypotheses, what better propositions can we put forward to explain the Sikh situation today? In answering it is necessary to note that modernizing thought since the so-called Enlightenment, a European movement especially reflected in philosophy of the eighteenth century, has tended to discount any use of hypotheses of explanations which include the supernatural or that which passes human understanding. Recently some cracks in this carapace have begun to show.

It is now possible to tune back and take up our consideration of the position of Fundamentalism, Modernity and Sikhism over against their background in some major trends of thinking about

World History. World History is not a modern western invention. In the eighth century before the Common Era strata of the Jewish Torah, building on much older West Asian and Egyptian ideas, and the Jewish Scriptures as a whole give us a *schema* of how the nations came to be and how they interact and the plan of their history. In the Puranas Indic thinkers give us concepts of world ages and world movements. In the eighth/fourteenth century Ibn Khaldun gives us in his *Muqaddimah* a pattern which looks back to the earlier thinking of Arabs and Jews.

It is impressive how many older Sikhs of my generation read at High School H.G. Wells' *Short History of the World* which originally came out in 1924. I have also met a good number who have read Toynbee. Although Karl Jaspers wrote in German many of his ideas have come to be known to users of English. Thus a number of us take it almost for granted that there is a kind of intellectual spirit of the age (*Zeitgeist*) which seems mysteriously to affect thinkers across the world with the same kind of ideas just as it is said new bird songs will spread from bird to bird across an island. Jaspers especially juxtaposes the Athenian philosophers, the Hebrew prophets, the U panishadic seers and the Chinese sages in an Axial Age.<sup>6</sup>

Joseph Needham in his eighty-eighth year remarked that if he had time to carry the implications of his *History of Science and Technology in China* into World History he would very much desire to trace Taoist ideas and techniques for instance with regard to chemistry and the use of gun powder in their influence upon Muslim scientists such as the alchemists.<sup>7</sup> One could follow this up to try to postulate a transmission of thinking even in a perverted way between the original Chinese invention of gunpowder and the Portuguese floating fortress. There are many such transmissions which suggest themselves but lack of sound historical evidence interdicts even their formulation. We turn back to trying to trace some factors in History of Religion which, if not transmitted, naturally overtake or take place in an ecclesiastical body or corpus at a certain point in her life.

At Chicago William McNeill and Marshall Hodgson formulated ideas which have deeply affected Bruce Lawrence whose book was mentioned above. In her years of Empire, Muslim Civilization was according to this hypothesis breathed through and through by q religion which was its conscience and shaper. But during the time of "the Great Western Transmutation" of world

history, religion was apparently not a predominant controlling factor or an effective conscience.<sup>8</sup> However, when some thinkers in great cultures and civilizations, including western culture, see their societies disintegrating, their young being lost to them, their best traditions destroyed, they turn desperately to their religions as a means of hope and a way of working for survival, recovery and resurgence. This is a comparatively late movement which of its own nature must come after the modernizers have brought the threatening outside influences into their own most cherished holies of holies. As a movement it too will use the language and methods of the enemy in its attempt to recover the fundamentals as it imagines them. It too will invent tradition. It too will use science and technology and be dependent on them and indeed be transformed by them. Broadly and approximately Fundamentalism may be considered such a movement or a manifestation of this tendency.

Let us turn back to Sikhism. Sikhism was presented to the world by the first Guru who lived from 1469 to 1539. The tenth occupied the *takht* from 1675 to 1708. During those centuries the Punjab faced yet more of the Muslim invasions which had gone on since the days of Mahmud of Ghazni, and the Europeans arrived and began to weave India into their world web. In the nineteenth century they broke in with full force bringing their world diseases, economics, their philosophical, religious and political ideals and failures. They brought their ways of education, science and technology. Everywhere the local product seemed to be swept away. Even their intellectual history with its tale of revolutions in politics, literary critical method, social and gender structure, its divorce between religion, ethics, philosophy and politics found local supporters and exponents and some partial acceptance. But the response in Sikhism was not just one of meeting one emergency after another, or the evolution of an overall response by anyone person nor of a committee nor of a group of leaders. Rather at base it was the continued unfolding of the enseeded, encoded nature of Sikhism as originally propounded by the first Mahala and the other nine. After the tenth it was vested in the Book and in the *Sangat* and the same Spirit told forth the same truths as they applied to that stage of life. Let us give but one brief example. It was not one person, however brilliant, saying *Hum Hindu nain hai* late in the nineteenth century but the First Teacher coming up from the Three Day Waters saying *Hai nain Hindu, Hai nain Mussulman* which is

basic. The nineteenth century remark is but a working out of the early teaching. in that dichotomy we find posited a third something (the *tertium quid* of our title): Sikhism.

In the debate about Fundamentalism and Modernity other buzz words are appearing. These include "primitivism," that is, the seeking for a primitive pure state and the attempt to imitate it under present day conditions. This may be called the restoration ideal or a quest for a return to the primordial, a seeking for a renewal of a primal vision. At the same time many are talking of ours as a post-modern age. There is growing suspicion of western ways just as they penetrate more and more places. A colleague brought back from former East Germany a copy of a poster which shows an attractive young western woman giving a cigarette in a packet labelled "West" to a Russian official who is choking on his own cigarette. The caption in Russian says "Try out the West" or more snappily "Test the West." A caption in German says "This applies in East Germany too." On the packet there is a printed warning in English about Life in the West with "its banal culture and brutal extremes of poverty."

In their day thinkers both Eastern, Western and from Africa and the Pacific have done their best. We test their best, each time the teachings of Sikhism may seem to be fitted into their categories. Then we find it escaping their fingers and passing on its way. Young Sikh scholars thoroughly grounded in their own inheritance who are encouraged and enabled to devote the years of detailed and disciplined study to the age-long international debate from China to California via the Punjab and Olduvai Gorge will contribute much to a genuine theory of World History.

## PREFERENCES

- 1 For dictionary definitions see for instance any recent edition of Webster's College Dictionary. Compare also handbooks like Roger Scruton's *A Dictionary of Political Thought*, London: Pan Books 1982. These works do not really attempt to define so much as to sum up current usage. However, the article' on "Fundamentalism" in edited Mircea Eliade: *Encyclopedia of Religions*, Free Press and MacMillan: New York 1988 volume gives some definitions and bibliography. (This Encyclopedia is disgracefully inadequate on Sikhism though one article by Khushwant Singh is a masterpiece.) The works of James Barr culminating in his *Fundamentalism* (London, 1977), though written from a British point of view, have an exactness of scholarship and originality which make fascinating reading.

- 2 Published by Harper and Row: San Francisco, 1989.
- 3 Again for bibliography see in edited Mircea Eliade: Encyclopedia of Religion, Volume 10, the articles on Modernism and Modernity
- 4 C.W.T. is a term used by Marshall Hodgson whom we mention below which has come into jargon use in American Universities. Like the Ninja Mutant Turtles of present day fame it is by no means purely western. The British would not have got far in India in any of their enterprises without widespread and gifted local help and cooperation. The CWT is a world achievement even as it is a world tragedy
- 5 Essay number 6 in a collection edited by Lionel Caplan: Studies in Religious undamentalism, London: MacMillan Press, 1987
- 6 With Karl Jaspers it is impossible to pick out a few titles but ed. Edith Ehrlich, etc., Basic Philosophical Writings, Selections, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986 and Man in the Modern Age, London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1959, give an inkling
- 7 The writer had the privilege of two visits with Dr. Joseph Needham in July 1988. He made the remarks quoted in conversation. When I asked after his middle name "Noel," he said he was born on the first Christmas of the century. Volumes 1 and 2 of his Science and Civilization in China. Cambridge (England): University Press, 1956 and 1958, are the most relevant to our purpose.
- 8 On William Hardy McNeill see his Readings in World History, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968 and A World History, 1967, subsequently re-edited. On Marshall CS. Hodgson see the Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a world Civilization, Chicago: University Press, 3 volumes, 1974. Other "display options" as the bibliographical retrieval systems say, include Sir Herbert Butterfield, Christopher Dawson and a host of Others.

## 2

# AN INCOMPARABLE LITURGY: SACRED NIT-NEM AMONG THE WORLD RELIGIONS

**NOEL Q. KINC**

The study of the world religions comparatively, that is, side by side, is a young subject.<sup>1</sup> Under such names as Comparative Religion, Religionsgeschichte, Religious Studies, etc., claiming to be as vertebrate as Theology, as carapaced with jargon and technology as a Social Science, it has often failed to possess its own soul. Born among the euphoria of the “discovery” by Europeans of the religious bases of the world cultures it fell easily into Europe’s pitfalls. These ranged onwards from the idea that objectivity demanded that the scholar should ultimately not believe believers but tacitly consider them deceived or deceivers, onwards to the tacit assumption that anything which passes human rationality cannot exist. They included the European cultural arrogance of the modern day as well as pernicious accidents of European cultural history such as the warfare of science and religion and philosophy’s desire to scour pots among enemies rather than pursue truth in the company of friends. In the pioneer days some of its most brilliant exponents were Christian missionaries who should have known better than to glorify their own faith by denigrating others. Yet in the end they were the brothers of the imperialists just as the Norman bishops who dismantled the Anglo-Saxon church were the brothers of the barons. The wonder is how often their faith led them to sincere admiration and crypto-conversion. This happened quite often, especially as the fever of imperialism burnt itself out. Therefore we women and men of many faiths and none at all, Western, Eastern, and rootless, come with respect and reverence to study together in a comparative context a unique gem of world religion, a mountain of light. It belongs to the Sikhs who graciously permit and indeed invite those who enter by the proper way and in a decent state of body and

mind to join them. No one is asked to leave outside her or his critical powers or propensity to discuss.

The daily prayer of the Sikhs is usually taken to include at least *Japuji*, *Japu Sahib*, *Sudha Swayyei*, *Rehras Sahib*, *Ardas* and *Sohila*. I would be the last to exclude *Anand Sahib*. It is fairly common, especially amongst older people, to use *Sukhmani* in addition. In Gurdwara and more public and congregational use, *Asa-di-var* is also used, but our present focus is on personal and domestic use.<sup>2</sup>

The first setting-side-by-side (*Auseinandetzung* as the Germans state it) of our brief comparison is with the outcome of recent study of prayer among the primordial religions such as those at the basis of African, New Guinean, or Native American Traditional Religions.<sup>3</sup> A great deal of work has been done by students of Language, Linguistics, Philosophy, Anthropology, and Psychology. Much jargon language has been generated but at the same time it has become absolutely clear that the human is a prayerful animal.<sup>4</sup> And, let it be whispered, prayer seems to have some effect, if only on the pray-er. In this matter Sikh prayer with its roots in the old Punjab undoubtedly has primordial and primal affinities. The whole resonance of the *shabad*, so prominent in this liturgy immediately takes the worshipper back to the primeval moment when humans first entered the land of the five rivers.<sup>5</sup>

A second juxtaposition of Sikh prayer can be with the daily prayer of the Muslims.<sup>6</sup> From the first Mahala onwards we know how familiar the framers of Sikh Prayer have been with both the Islamic set of prayers and Sufi practice.<sup>7</sup> A detailed comparison brings out many similarities of intention and effect but an overall difference.

Even more so in looking at the legion of Hindu practices, it is valuable to note the fundamental differences while recognizing common ground.<sup>8</sup> Similarly in the world of remnant Buddhism in the days and journeys of the ten gurus which has not yet been fully evaluated in the context of its relationship to Sikhism. Possibly some of the factors which produced the warrior-monk and businessman-under-discipline in Japan were held in common and appeared independently. The full meeting of Sikhism and Buddhism will be interesting to watch and its next stages seem likely to take place in North America.

Of course the best school in which to study Sikh prayer is regular practice and attendance at it. Much can also be learned in conversation. As a scholar one longs for a systematic survey which



could tell us how many and how deeply Sikhs in, say, the Punjab, the United Kingdom., Canada and California really know, use and practice *Nit-Nem*. One longs to collect narrations of how it has served people's needs in different circumstances.<sup>9</sup>

However our present focus for discussion must be on the "Western," "modern," "scientific" world that Sikhism has so dramatically entered. Here Judaism and Christianity seem to be undergoing the same purgation and refinding of selfhood which Sikhism went through from the 1840s to 1940s. For twenty years my large classes in California consisting mainly of people of Christian, Jewish, or agnostic background have betrayed little knowledge of daily prayer. They are willing enough to learn but no one has taught them. In this situation we look at *Nit-Nem* and meditate upon its future. The original language cannot be abandoned. The wholesale dropping of Latin and the invention of modern Hebrew can teach us much.

There are practical difficulties too. If we depend too much on a professional expert, she or he may indeed know the subject profoundly but know nothing of the thought-worlds in which our children live. So much must devolve on father and mother, they must find time to practice and to teach, especially their lives themselves must be a lesson.

In this short paper I have given a brief and bald summary of what is for me a long term and never ending delight and study.<sup>10</sup> Dr. Jasbir Singh Mann of California once prescribed for me as I grew older a daily recitation of *Blessed Sukhmani*. One needs many years just to begin to grasp the magnitude of the treasure of Sikh Prayer but even a little time given to it brings immediate rewards. In a world resounding with ecofeminism and cosmic vision we may joyfully acclaim the *salok* at the end of *Japuji* which begins with those glorious words:

*pavan guru pani pita*

"Air the Guru, water the father, earth great mother, Day and night,  
two men and women nurses with whom the cosmos plays..."

## PREFERENCE

- 1 The articles of Eric Sharpe in edited Mircea Eliade: *The Encyclopedia of religion*, New York: MacMillan and Free Press, 1988 on *Comparative Religion* and on

*Dialogue of Religion* give a factual introduction and extensive bibliography

- 2 On the content of *Nit-Nem* and its availability to study by any who desires to benefit by its bounty, see the relevant articles in the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, to be published at Patiala by Professor Harbans Singh. There are also numerous locally printed Gurmukhi texts of *Nit-Nem*. Their text should be checked with the authoritative printed texts of the *Adi Granth*. Translations with notes by Sikh authors include Jogendra Singh: *Sikh Ceremonies*, Bombay 1941, Chandigarh, 1968, Harbans Singh Doabia: *Sacred Nitnem*, Amritsar, revised editions, 1976 and later, text, transliteration, translation and notes and Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Nitnem, daily prayer texts of the Sikhs*, New Delhi, 1983
- 3 Sam D. Gill's article of "Prayer" in edited Mircea Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion* is stronger on Native American, African and Jewish, Christian, Muslim traditions than it is on South or East Asia. Like this *Encyclopedia* (apart from a few articles) as a whole it seems oblivious to Sikhism
- 4 Jargon weeds bloom abundantly in this meadow. They range from "Performative utterance" to "second-order language facts (meta-language)." Antti Alhonsaari's *Prayer: an Analysis of Theological Terminology*, Helsinki: Kirjapaino Tarmo, 1973, is a highly technical thin-lipped account which somehow also reflects warmth, respect and personal experience
- 5 It is important to note that in this article I am not dealing with the important point that every part of the Holy *Adi Granth Sahib* (and hence most of *Nit-Nem*) has its appropriate musical raga. This enhances its beauty even as a setting in gold enhances diamonds. To write about it requires the learning of someone like Dr. Gobind Singh Mansukhani whom we rejoice to see at this conference
- 6 Islam is well-served by the Orientalist encyclopedists under such words as *namaz*, *du a*, *salat*. Sardar Narinder Singh of Ottawa reminded me of the great importance of Sufism in this context, so at the least one should follow up *dhikr* (*zikr*, compare Hebrew root *zkr* and New Testament anamnesis.)
- 7 From the still-living Punjab oral tradition in the days when Muslims and Sikhs lived together come memories of chuckles from members of both religions when the story was told of the Guru discomfiting the Mullah who carried out all the motions of prayer while fixated on whether his new-born foal would fall down the well
- 8 About Hindu practices of prayer one can only say 'Which practice of the very many?' Shall we think of the Vedic hymn of Wandering Thoughts in Prayer, of the woman interceding for her sick child before an icon of Lady Kali, of the follower of Patanjali's *Yoga-sutra* in deep prayerful contemplation? Again for bibliography the reader may follow up relevant articles in Eliade or in one of the Encyclopedias of Hinduism.
- 9 It is hoped that the various Sikh Associations in Britain and North America will take up collecting the individual histories of their members who are the pioneer generation to settle in the west. In these histories it is hoped the writers will be asked to give details of their use of *Nit-Nem* and its service to them.
- 10 There are items I have mentioned which could be easily each expanded to form the chapter of a monograph. With much study perhaps some member of the community could put us all in her or his debt with a work comparing Sikh and Christian hymnody.

## 3

## ESSENCE OF THE SIKH ETHICS

AVTAR SINGH

Sikhism is a very distinct religious tradition which has related the Divine revelation with a way of life in a manner which shows the harmonious convergence of a belief-structure and a value-ideal. The knowledge of the real and the goal of its realization are presented as one continuum. The life is lived as a journey towards *Sachiara*, the highest reality.

There is another important aspect of the Sikh religion. The people who came to accept the revelation as well as the life-ideal constituted a society which was given a very distinct identity. This identity has an internal as well as an external constituent. As in the case of many other perceptions, the element of external identity is more noticeable to a superficial observer. This also appears to be more in line with the observations of this kind. Such perceptions are, however, often also determined by the pre-conceived ideas about the nature of identity. The historical context of this identity is sometimes perceived to be an important element of the identity itself. The questions of history are thereafter treated as the questions of its identity. This confusion results into invitation to the sociologists, anthropologists, and some historians, to continue talking about identity without reference to the ethical core which is its inner element. The results range from genuine confusion to intentional mis-reading of Sikhism.

Some of the recently produced literature on Sikhism shows the inadequacies of the methodologies which were devised to deal with societies which were insulated in their social interaction and their identities were related with their history. It is important to understand the question of Sikh identity in terms of its ethical ideal. The Sikh philosophy is the proper context in which the questions of its history and social development can be understood and Appreciated.

## 4

## THE SIKH WORLD-VIEW : ITS IDEOLOGICAL IDENTITY

DALJEET SINGH

**Introduction :** In order to understand the Sikh worldview, it is necessary to answer a number of questions, namely, (1) what is the spiritual experience of the Gurus about the Fundamental Reality ? (2) what are the logical implications of that religious experience ? (3) how do these implications or ideas differ from those in other religions ? (4) did those ideas govern the course of Sikh religion ? and (5) what future does the Sikh worldview hold for man ? In answering these questions, we shall confine ourselves entirely to the *bani* in Guru Granth Sahib and historically accepted facts about the lives of the Gurus. Many of the misrepresentations about Sikhism arise from the failure of writers to understand Sikhism on the basis of its thesis, or to define Sikhism in terms of doctrines in Guru Granth Sahib. Obviously, in this short paper, we shall only give an outline of the Sikh worldview. We shall start with a definition of the Fundamental Reality or God in Sikhism.

*God in Sikhism:* The Reality or God has been profusely defined in Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak calls Him “*Karta Purkh*” or “Creator Person”, the world being His creation. Apart from being immanent in the world, He is the Ocean of Virtues, i.e., He is a God of Attributes. In defining the fundamental nature of God, the Guru says, “Friends ask me what is the mark of the Lord. He is all Love, the rest He is Ineffable.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, the key to understanding the Sikh worldview is that God is Love. And Love has four clear facets : It is dynamic; it is the mother of all virtues and values; it is directive or has a will; and it is benevolent towards life in which He is immanent; i.e., it generates neither a dialectical movement, nor a class war, nor suicidal competition or struggle.

*Corollaries of ‘God is Love’ :* This spiritual experience leads to five corollaries. First, it *ipso facto* gives status, meaning and reality to the world and life, because Love and God’s Attributes can be

expressed only in a becoming universe. For, when God was all by Himself, the question of love and devotion did not arise. In unambiguous words, the Guru says, "True is He, and true is His creation."<sup>2</sup> Second, it clearly implies that the religious man has to lead a life of creativity and activity. Consequently, a householder's life is accepted and monasticism is spurned. Third, it gives spiritual sanction to the moral life of man, indicating thereby that it should be of the same character as the loving nature of God. For, "Love, contentment, truth, humility and virtues enable the seed of *Naam* (God) to sprout."<sup>3</sup> This clearly prescribes the methodology of deeds. Fourth, it unambiguously points out the direction in which human effort should move, and the yardstick with which to measure human conduct. This sets the goal for the seeker, or Godman. Fifth, it shows the gracious interest of God in human affairs and activities. An important attribute of God is that He is 'Guru' or Enlightener who gives both knowledge and guidance, i.e., spiritual experience is noetic. The Guru's God being a God of Will, one feels confident that one is working in line with His altruistic Will. For, God is perpetually creating and watching the world with His Benevolent Eye.<sup>4</sup> And, He rewards every effort to become divine.<sup>5</sup> For that matter, it gives man hope, strength and optimism.

#### Implication of 'God is Love' Implication of 'God is Love'

Here it is necessary to stress that the definition that God is Love, is extremely important for determining the category of Sikh religion. For, all systems in which God is Love, are life-affirming, and there is an integral combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. And, as in the case of Abu Ben Adam, love of one's fellowmen, is the primary and essential counterpart of the love of God. But, in life-negating systems, there is a clear dichotomy between the empirical life and the spiritual life of man. And *sanyasa*, asceticism, monasticism, withdrawal from life, pacifism or *ahimsa* and celibacy are the normal modes of the spiritual path. Sikhism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity belong to the first category. Jainism and most other Indian systems belong to the second category.

In fact, differences in approach to life are due to the basic difference in the spiritual experience. In the second category of systems like Vaisnavism and Vedanta, God has been defined as *sat-chit-ananda* (truth-consciousness-bliss). This is far from being a dynamic concept. Stace has made a detailed survey of the description various mystics give of the nature of their spiritual experience of the Ultimate Reality. They all give blessedness, tranquility, holiness, unitary

consciousness and ineffability as the nature of their spiritual experience.<sup>6</sup> No mystic mentions love as the characteristic of that experience. The distinction is not arbitrary, but real. Huxley says, "The Indians say, the thought and the thinker and the thing thought about are one and then of the way in which this unowned experience becomes something belonging to me; then no me any more and a kind of *sat-chit-ananda* at one moment without *karuna* or charity (how odd that the Vedantists say nothing about love) ..... I had an inkling of both kinds of *nirvana* — the loveless being, consciousness, bliss and the one with love, and, above all, sense that one can never love enough."<sup>7</sup> He also says, "Staying in this ecstatic consciousness and cutting oneself off from participation and commitment in the rest of the world — this is perfectly expressed today in powerful slang, in the phrase 'dropping out.' It completely denies the facts, it is morally wrong, and finally of course, absolutely catastrophic." "Absolutely Catastrophic."<sup>8</sup> Hence, the religious system laid down by the Gurus is radically different from the earlier Indian systems.

#### Consequent Differences with Other Consequent Differences with Other

#### Religious Systems of India Religious Systems of India

As it is, the Guru's concept of God is quite different from the concept of many of the quietist mystics, or from the Indian concept of *sat-chit-ananda*. We find that Guru Nanak's system follows strictly his spiritual experience and his view of the Attributes of God. And as a Godman, he seeks to follow the line of expression of God's attributes in the world of man. Consequently, in the empirical life, this concept has important implications which stand emphasised in the *bani* and life of Guru Nanak. Hence, Guru Nanak's system and its growth are entirely different from his contemporary religious systems and their growth.

First, it means, as already pointed out, the reality of the world and the life-affirming character of Sikhism. For, God is not only immanent in the world, He also expresses His Love and Attributes in the empirical world, and casts a Benevolent Eye on His creation. But in Vedanta and other Indian systems, the world is either *mithya*, an illusion, a misery, or a suffering. Second, Sikhism being life-affirming, this, inevitably, involves an integral combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. This constitutes the foundation of the *miri-piri* doctrine laid down by Guru Nanak in his *bani*. In other words, Guru Nanak's system is a whole-life system like Islam and Judaism, which also

combine the spiritual and the empirical lives of man. Third, in consequence of it, monasticism, *sanyasa*, asceticism, pacifism and withdrawal from life are rejected, and a householder's life is accepted as the forum of spiritual activities and growth. Logically, monasticism and celibacy go together, and Guru Nanak categorically rejected both of them. Obviously, God's qualities of being 'Shelter to the shelterless', 'Milk to the child', 'Riches to the poor', and 'Eyes to the blind',<sup>9</sup> can be expressed by the Godman only by being a householder and participating in all walks of life, and not by withdrawing from them. The fourth difference follows as a corollary to this and to the rejection of celibacy, namely, equality between man and woman.

In contrast, we find that in life-negating systems, and more especially in the Indian systems, the position on all these four points is essentially different. For them, life is far from real or an arena of spiritual endeavours. The spiritual path and the worldly path are considered separate and distinct. Whether it is Vedanta, Jainism, Buddhism, Vaisnavism or Nathism, asceticism, monasticism, *ahimsa*, *sanyasa* or withdrawal from life into *bhikshuhood* is the normal course. In consequence, celibacy is the rule, and woman is deemed to be a temptress. Digambara Jains believe that a woman cannot reach *kaivalya* (spiritual summit), and has first to achieve male incarnation.<sup>10</sup> In Buddhism, woman *bhikshus* are deemed second grade compared to male *bhikshus* who are considered senior to them.<sup>11</sup> A male *bhikshu* is not supposed to touch and rescue a drowning woman, even if she were his mother.<sup>12</sup> Sankara calls woman 'the gateway to hell.'<sup>13</sup> Both Ramanuja and Shankaradeva (a liberal Vaisnava saint) would not admit a woman to be a Vaisnava.<sup>14</sup> The latter stated, "Of all the terrible aspirations of the world, woman is the ugliest. A slight side glance of hers captivates even the hearts of celebrated sages. Her sight destroys prayer, penance and meditation. Knowing this, the wise keep away from the company of woman."<sup>15</sup> *Bhagat Kabir*, we know, is considered a misogynist and calls woman 'black cobra', 'pit of hell' and 'the refuse of the world.'<sup>16</sup> It is well-known that even today in Catholic Christianity, a woman is not ordained as a priest. Against this, Guru Nanak not only sanctioned a householder's life but stated as to, "How can a woman be called impure, when without woman there would be none."<sup>17</sup>

All this has been explained to stress that the basic perceptions about the nature of the spiritual experience and the ontological

Reality being different, the spiritual paths, under the two categories of systems, become automatically divergent.

Further, the acceptance of a householder's life has important empirical and socio-political implications. Except for Guru Harkrishan, who died at an early age, every Guru married and led a householder's life. By way of demonstration, this step was essential, otherwise, the entire Indian tradition being different, Guru Nanak's system would have been completely misunderstood and misinterpreted. We are well aware that it is the Naths who questioned Guru Nanak as to how incongruous it was that he was, wearing the clothes of a householder, and at the same time claiming to follow the religious path. Guru Nanak's reply was equally cryptic and categoric, when he said that the Naths did not know even the elementaries of the spiritual path.<sup>18</sup> For this very reason, the Guru did not make his son, Baba Sri Chand, a recluse, his successor.

Regarding the fifth important difference about the goal of life of the religious man, Guru Nanak has made the position very clear in his Japuji. After putting a specific question as to what is the way to be a *sachia* or a true man, the Guru, while clearly rejecting the method of observing silence, coupled with continuous concentration or meditation, replies that the right method and goal are to carry out the Will of God.<sup>19</sup> And, God being Love and the Ocean of Virtues, His Will is Altruistically Creative and Dynamic. The Sikh goal of life is, thus, to be active and live a creative life of love and virtues. The goal is not personal salvation, or merger in Brahman, but an ever active life of love. It is in this context that Guru Nanak gives the call, "If you want to play the game of love, then come to my path with your head on your palm; once you set your foot on this way, then find not a way out and be prepared to lay down your head."<sup>20</sup> For him, life is a game of love. It is significant that the same advice was given by Guru Arjun to Bhai Manjh who was then a Sakhi Sarvarya and wanted to be a Sikh of the Guru, "You may go on with the easy path of Sakhi Sarvar worship, because Sikhism is a very difficult path, and unless you are willing to be dispossessed of your wealth and to sacrifice your very life, it is no use coming to me."<sup>21</sup> Exactly, the same call for total commitment and sacrifice was given by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi Day, 1699, when he created the Khalsa and administered *amrit* to the *Panj Piaras*.

The goal being different, the sixth implication is as to the



method to achieve that goal. In Sikhism, the emphasis is on the methodology of deeds. Guru Nanak has made this point very clear when he says in *Japuji* : “Man’s assessment in His court is done on the basis of one’s deeds”,<sup>22</sup> and “It is by one’s deeds that we become near or away from God.”<sup>23</sup> In order to stress the fundamental spiritual importance of deeds, Guru Nanak says, “Everything is lower than Truth, but higher still is truthful living.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, when the Guru defines the *gurmukh* or the superman, he calls him : ‘One who always lives truthfully.’

*Essentials of Sikh Life and Its Differences with Other Systems in Matters of Social Responsibility*

The basic difference between a whole-life system and a dichotomous system is that in the former, every field of life of operation of God, is also the field of operation and responsibility of both the Godman and the seeker. This is the broad approach. Having defined the nature of God and the goal of man, the important issue is what are the essentials of the religious life. In the context explained above, Guru Nanak has fixed specific duties and responsibilities of the religious life. The first is of accepting equality between man and woman. Guru Nanak clearly states, “Why downgrade woman, when without woman there would be none”,<sup>25</sup> and “It is she who gives birth to great persons.”<sup>26</sup> When the Third Guru created *manjis* or districts of religious administration, women were appointed in charge of some of them.<sup>27</sup> The second responsibility is of maintaining equality between man and man. This was a direct blow to the social ideology of *Varn Ashram Dharma* which gave scriptural sanction to the hierarchical caste system. Guru Nanak found fault with that ideology saying, “The Vedas make a wrong distinction of caste”,<sup>28</sup> and “One cannot be a Yogi by mere wishing, real Yoga lies in treating all alike.”<sup>29</sup> He demonstrated the primary importance of treating all as equal by taking, after his enlightenment, Mardana, a low caste Muslim, as his life companion. This meant a total departure from the then existing religious prejudices, not only against lower castes, but also against Muslims who were regarded as *malechhas*. He made it clear that any one wanting to join his society, had, at the very start, to shed all prejudices against inter-religious or inter-caste dining and social intercourse. The revolutionary character of this step could be gauged from the fact that a Ramanuja would throw the entire food as polluted, if any one cast a glance on it while he had been preparing or eating it.<sup>30</sup>

The third social responsibility, Guru Nanak emphasises, is the importance of work. This too, we find, was something opposed to the then prevalent religious practice. Evidently, other-worldliness, *sanyasa* and monasticism excluded the religious necessity of work and sustaining the society. In fact, the Naths who were then the principal religious organisation in Punjab took a vow never to engage themselves in any work or business.<sup>31</sup> But Guru Nanak says, "The person incapable of earning his living gets his ears split (i.e., turns a Nath Yogi) and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a Guru or saint. Do not look up to him, nor touch his feet. He knows the way who earns his living and shares his earnings with others."<sup>32</sup> The Guru deprecates the Yogi who gives up the world, and then is not ashamed of begging at the door of the householders.<sup>33</sup> The fourth social responsibility Guru Nanak stresses is about the sharing of wealth. He states, "God's bounty belongs to all, but men grab it for themselves."<sup>34</sup> "Man gathers riches by making others miserable."<sup>35</sup> "Wealth cannot be gathered without sin, but it does not keep one's company after death."<sup>36</sup> All this clearly condemns exploitative collection of wealth. The story of Guru Nanak rejecting the invitation of Malik Bhago, a rich person exploiting the poor, but accepting the hospitality of Lalo, a poor labourer, illustrates the same point as stressed in his *bani*. Thus, the twin ideas about the brotherhood of man and the sharing of wealth to eliminate poverty and maintain equality in society are stressed by Guru Nanak. Even after his missionary tours, Guru Nanak took to the role of a peasant for the last 18 years of his life. It is significant that till the time of the Sixth Guru, when social and military duties of the leadership and organisation of the Sikh society became quite heavy and absorbing, every Sikh Guru had been doing a vocation or business to support his family.

The fifth social responsibility, where Guru Nanak radically departed from all the contemporary religious systems, including Sufism, Santism and Christianity, was his approach towards injustice and oppression of all kinds in society. He made a meticulous study of injustice and corruption, aggression and incongruity in every field of life. He pointed out the greed and hypocrisy of Brahmin priests and Mullahs, the 'blood thirsty corruption' and injustice by lower and higher-rung officials in the administration, the misrule, oppression and irresponsibility of the local rulers, their inability to give security, fairplay and peace to the people, and brutal and barbaric butchery of the people.

All this was not just idle rhetoric, but a diagnostic assessment of the prevailing turmoil and conditions in the society, which the Guru felt, needed to be changed. It needs to be emphasised that in Guru Nanak's ideology, there was nothing like private or personal salvation. Just as God of Love is benevolently looking after the entire world, in the same way, the Godman's sphere of activity and responsibility is equally wide, and is unhedged by any self-created barriers. This is, as we shall see, a fundamental difference between a salvation religion catering for individuals, and a universal religion catering for the spiritual well-being of society as a whole.

Here it is very relevant to give, as recorded by Bertrand Russell, the contrasted approach of St Augustine, one of the greatest exponents of the Christian gospel and author of *City of God*. Russell concludes : "It is strange that the last men of intellectual eminence before the dark ages were concerned, not with saving civilization or expelling the barbarians or reforming the abuses of the administration, but with preaching the merit of virginity and the damnation of unbaptized infants. Seeing that these were the preoccupations that the Church handed on to the converted barbarians, it is no wonder that the succeeding age surpassed almost all other fully historical periods in cruelty and superstition."<sup>37</sup> Whereas Guru Nanak meticulously points out every dark spot in the religious and socio-political life of his times, St Augustine is simply unconcerned with socio-political conditions of his period. For, "Augustine's *City of God* (426) attacked both Christians who expected the world to get better and pagans with a cyclic view of history. Augustine did not believe that the spread of Christianity would ensure political and economic improvement. The earthly city of self-will would continue to exist amidst the rise and fall of states and empires."<sup>38</sup>

Another important fact is Guru Nanak's criticism in *Babar Vani* of the brutalities and massacres perpetrated and misery caused by the invaders. He condemns them in the strongest terms and complains to God for allowing the weak to be trampled upon by the strong.<sup>39</sup> This hymn has an extremely important lesson, which many of us have missed. For, anything which is within the sphere of His creation and the responsibility of God, is certainly within the sphere of responsibility of the Godman. The hymn has four implications; first, that injustice and oppression are violative of the Order of God; second, that as the Master and God of Love, harmony has to be maintained by His Will; third, that, as the instrument of God, it is the spiritual duty and responsibility of the Godman to confront all kinds of injustice; and, fourth, that, as such, resistance to oppression was a task and a target laid down by the Guru for the religious society he was organising.

It is Guru Nanak who defines God as 'Destroyer of the evil-doers',<sup>40</sup> 'Destroyer of demoniacal persons',<sup>41</sup> 'Slayer of the inimical',<sup>42</sup> and 'Protector of the weak.' Such being the God of Guru Nanak, it is equally the responsibility of the Godman, *gurmukh*, or the Sikh to carry out His Will which is just and altruistic. In short, in Guru Nanak's system to ensure equality and fair play and to react against injustice and aggression, become the religious duty and responsibility of the Sikh. Since the dawn of civilisation, the greatest oppression and injustice have undeniably been done by the rulers, the State, or the Establishment who have possessed all the instruments of power and coercion. It is impossible for individuals to confront such power. This leads to two important inferences. First, that in a whole-life system like Sikhism, which combines spiritual life with the empirical life of man and accepts the *miri-piri* doctrine, the religious man must, as a religious duty, resist and confront injustice, wherever it takes place.

Second, that such a religious man should not only be cognizant of such injustice, but also organise a society that should be in a position to face the challenge of such injustice and oppression. This follows logically both from Guru Nanak's *bani* and his system. This also explains why from the very beginning of his mission, he started organising the Sikh societies at places which he visited and how the societies were logically linked and developed by his successors into the *Panth*. These aspects are very significant and important about his society and religion. It is obvious to every student of the *Adi Granth* that so far as the ideology is concerned, it had been completely laid down in the *bani* of Guru Nanak. But what was lacking was the presence of a properly motivated and responsible society that should be in a position to successfully discharge the responsibility of reacting against injustice and oppression prevalent in his times.

There is another important and related issue. Having cast on his society the responsibility of confronting injustice, again it is Guru Nanak who eliminates the hurdle of *ahimsa* or pacificism that stood as a bar against the religious man or a religious society trying to confront socio-political aggression. Among Vaisnavas, Jains, Buddhist Bhikshus, Naths, or Radical Sants like Kabir, *ahimsa* is deemed to be a cardinal virtue and meat eating is a prohibition. These religious persons are all from life-negating systems, with personal salvation as the ideal. But a society that has to accept the social responsibility of confronting injustice cannot remain wedded to the hurdle of *ahimsa*. For, reason and force are

both neutral tools that can be used both for good and evil, for construction and destruction. That is why Guru Nanak says, "Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat eating, they do not know what is flesh and what is non-flesh, or in what lies sin and what is not sin",<sup>43</sup> and that "there is life in every grain of food we eat."<sup>44</sup>

*Role of Later Nine Gurus* *Role of Later Nine Gurus*: In a country, which for over 2000 years had been trained in religious systems involving clear dichotomy between spiritual and empirical life, and which had accepted *ahimsa* as a fundamental value and individual salvation as an ideal, it was no easy task to create a mature society with the new motivation of religious responsibility of always fighting injustice and oppression in all spheres of life.

It is very significant that Guru Nanak laid the foundations of every institution that was later developed and matured by his successors. By starting the institution of *langar* (common kitchen) and taking Mardana as his life companion, he gave a heavy blow to the divisive institution of *Varn Ashram Dharma*, pollution and caste. He created a separate Sikh society with their own *dharmasalas* as centres of religious worship and training. He sanctified the role of the householder as the medium of religious expression and progress, and made it plain that work was a necessity of life, and idleness a vice. He emphatically made it clear that to fight injustice and oppression is an essential duty of the religious man and the religious society. For that end, while he created a new society with a new ideology, he also removed the hurdle of *ahimsa*, so that his society could discharge its socio-religious responsibility without any unwanted inhibitions and impediments in its path. And since the new society had not yet been fully organised and developed, and had yet to be properly oriented to enable it to discharge its responsibilities, he also created the institution of succession. It is very significant of the social and societal aims of Guru Nanak that after passing the succession to Guru Angad, when he found him to be living a somewhat solitary life, he reminded him that he had to be active since he had to organise a society or *Panth*.<sup>45</sup>

In the time of the Second, Third and Fourth Guru, four important steps were taken. Through the creation of 22 *manjis* or districts of religious administration, the Sikh society was organised into a separate religious *Panth*. But, the most important and difficult part of the task was the creation of new motivations and the acceptance of the new

life-affirming religious ideals of Guru Nanak. For, these were radically new in their approach, implications and goals. The stupendous nature of the task of the Gurus can be judged from the fact that even today great Hindus, like Jadunath Sarkar, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, and Christians like McLeod, Cole, Toynbee and the like, all coming from pacifist traditions and conditioned by them, find it difficult to understand the spiritual role of the Sixth and the Tenth Master.

The Third Guru created new institutions which had the dual purpose of weaning the Sikhs away from the old Hindu society and of conditioning them in new values, ideals and practices. For example, while Guru Nanak had bypassed his recluse son, Sri Chand, for the same reasons, the Second and the Third Guru avoided persons of ascetic tendencies from entering the Sikh fold. The institution of *langar*, with the dual purpose of feeding the poor and of eliminating the caste and status prejudices and distinctions, was strengthened. Finally, the important religious centre of Darbar Sahib and the town of Amritsar were founded and developed for the periodical meetings of the Sikh society and visits of the Sikhs to the Guru. The object of all this was to establish a separate historical identity of the Sikhs and to wean them away from the traditional society, its centres of pilgrimage, and its religious practices and rituals. Not only had they to be trained in the essentials of a new religious system, but they had to be taken out of the strangle-hold of the Brahmin priests claiming to be the sole medium of religious growth, practice and interpretation.

Then came the stage of the Fifth Guru who created and installed the Sikh Scripture as the revealed and final doctrinal authority. The system of *daswandh* (giving 10% of one's earnings for the cause of the community) was organised. Sikhs were initiated into trading in horses, so that the transition to the next stage of militancy could become smooth. As the instrument of God on earth, the Sikhs called their Guru, 'True Emperor.' In the time of the Fifth Guru, the Sikh society had become 'a State within a State',<sup>46</sup> and had developed a social identity which had caught the eye of the Emperor, who considered it an unwanted socio-political growth. By his martyrdom, the Guru not only strengthened the faith and determination of the community, but also sought confrontation with the Empire, leaving instructions to his son to begin militarisation of the Sikhs. In the process, the Sixth Guru even recruited mercenaries to train his people. This phase of

martyrdom and confrontation with the Empire was continued by the subsequent Gurus till Guru Gobind Singh did, as recorded by his contemporary Kavi Sainapat, the epitomic work of starting the institutions of *amrit* and the Khalsa.<sup>47</sup> Having felt that the *Panth* had become mature and responsible enough, the Guru created the Khalsa in 1699, and requested the *Panj Piaras* to baptise him.<sup>48</sup> It is significant that at that time all the Guru's sons were alive, meaning thereby that Guru Nanak's mission had been completed and thereafter the succession was not to be continued. And, finally, the Guru made Guru Granth Sahib the Everlasting Guru of the Sikhs.<sup>49</sup>

Let us have a rapid look back to find out if the five tasks indicated by Guru Nanak had been accomplished. First, the Sikhs had been formed into a distinct new religious society with a Scripture of its own, being the full repository and complete and final guide of the Sikh ideology and its way of life. This separateness was made total by Guru Gobind Singh's *Nash* doctrine of five freedoms — *Dharam Nash*, *Bharam Nash*, *Kul Nash*, *Karam Nash* and *Kirt Nash*.<sup>50</sup> This means freedom from the bonds of old religions and traditions, of earlier superstitions and prejudices, of earlier acts and of restrictions in choice of trade or calling, or in professional mobility. The Tenth Master made a complete break with the earlier traditions and societies. Second, it was a society of householders, rejecting all kinds of otherworldliness, idleness and monasticism. Third, it was a casteless society with complete fraternity among its members. Men from the lowest and Sudra castes rose to be its leaders. The contrast is evident from the fact that while the Sikhs have never had Brahmin leaders, in India after Independence in 1947, the Prime Minister and practically every Chief Minister was a Brahmin. Four, it was a society which was fully earthaware; and habits of work, production and service became ingrained among its members. Begging was considered a disgrace in its social ethos. The fifth social responsibility discharged by the Sikhs was to free the country from the curse of a thousand-year wave of invaders from the North-West. Though the Sikhs were subjected over the years to the worst persecution in Indian history, yet they suffered it and emerged triumphant. And, finally, they were able once and for all to stem that tide. They have been trained to react against wrong, injustice and oppression. A society has been created with the ideal of a *Sant-Sipahi* (Saint-Soldier).

*Manmukh to Gurmukh : The Guru's Concept of evolution of Man :* Here, it is necessary to state the *manmukh-gurmukh* concept, which is essential for understanding the Sikh worldview. As the Gurus say, over millions of years life has evolved into man from a tiny speck of life. The Guru says, "For several births (you) were a mere worm, for several births, an insect, for several births a fish and an antelope", "After ages you have the glory of being a man."<sup>51</sup> "After passing through myriads of species, one is blest with the human form."<sup>52</sup> "God created you out of a drop of water and breathed life in you. He endowed you with the light of reason, discrimination and wisdom."<sup>53</sup> "O man, you are supreme in God's creation; now is your opportunity, you may fulfil or not fulfil your destiny."<sup>54</sup> At its present stage of development, man is, without doubt, better equipped than other animals, in so far as he has a higher sense of discrimination. But, as an ego-conscious being, he is still an animal, being a *manmukh*. This implies that whatever be human pretensions, man is basically and organically a self-centred being. His psyche is governed by an egoistic consciousness, that being his centre of awareness, control and propulsion. Because of his present inherent limitations of ego-consciousness, it is virtually impossible for man to avoid conflict, aggression, and wars. But the Gurus clearly hold out hope for man. There are four stages of evolution or development. The Guru says, "God created first, Himself, then *haumain*, third, *maya* (multifarious things and beings) and fourth, the next higher stage of the *gurmukh* who lives truthfully."<sup>55</sup> The Gurus clearly say that it is human destiny to reach the fourth stage and to meet God, or to be a *gurmukh*, or one who is in tune with the fundamental Reality or Universal Consciousness, God, *Naam*, or Love. His ideal is not merger in God or salvation, or union as an end in itself. Being the instrument of, or in touch with God's Altruistic Consciousness, he is spontaneously benevolent, compassionate, creative and loving. It is very important to note that the *gurmukh* or superman is not a quietist, he 'lives truthfully.' He lives as did the ten Gurus. For, Guru Nanak was called just a *gurmukh*. This is the next higher stage of evolution towards which life is striving and not towards darkness and death as materialist scientists would have us believe. Nor does Sikhism accept any concept of the basic sinfulness or fall of man from grace. It only indicates the constitutional weakness, immaturity or imperfection



of man at his present stage of the evolutionary process or development. Hence, it gives us an ideology of optimism and hope, invoking and exhorting us to make moral effort.

### Survey of Higher Religions

Before we draw our conclusions, let us make a brief survey of some religious ideologies of the world and find the place of Sikhism among them. There are four clear religious ideologies that are current today.

### Dichotomous Religions

First is the category of religious systems like Buddhism, Jainism, Nathism, Vaisnavism and Vedanta, in which there is clear dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life. Monasticism, *sanyasa*, otherworldliness, celibacy, yogic meditation and *ahimsa* are the common but important features of this category. They hold out no hope for man, except by withdrawal from life and yogic or one-point meditation. In each case, it is a path of personal salvation without any involvement in the socio-political affairs of man. Practically, all the Indian religions, except Sikhism, belong to this category.

### Judaism

Second is Judaism which has a long and chequered history. Basically, it is a system in which there is no dichotomy between the religious life and the empirical life of man. Prophet Moses who got the revelation, was both a religious and political leader. His Torah or Commandments and Laws prescribe and govern the entire gamut of the spiritual and temporal life of the Jews. It is a system that prescribes rules governing the conduct of prayer, rituals, sacrifices and their socio-political life. The renowned Hillel when asked to explain the 613 commandments of the Torah, replied, "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary, go and learn it."<sup>56</sup> In short, it is basically a life-affirming system. It makes no distinction between the spiritual and the socio-political life of man. The Torah governs every aspect of it. As to the means of resistance, Judaism recommends the use of force by saying, "Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth", and indicates rules for a righteous fight.<sup>57</sup> But, over its long history including the period of the prophets, this aspect of its principle has, to an extent, been altered, or changed at least by some sects of the community. At the time of the Babylonian attack (Sixth Century B.C.) on Palestine, Prophet Jeremiah strongly

recommended non-resistance or pacificism. He asserted that the attack was God's punishment to the Jews for their non-observance of His Laws.<sup>58</sup> His assertion was something like Mahatma Gandhi's statement that the Bihar earthquake was a punishment to the Hindus for their practice of untouchability. However, over the centuries thereafter, many religious sects of Jews like Essenes, Kabbalists, Hasidists, Therapeutics,<sup>59</sup> and even some Pharisees accepted the principle of non-resistance, pacificism, withdrawal and otherworldliness. Even monastic and celibate cults appeared among Jews, discarding both the world and the use of force. This important change, in a basic religious principle, we believe, came about in this religion in later parts of its history, when Judaism was unable to cope with challenges from the socio-political environment, and their religious fervour had been exhausted. Practically, all these otherworldly sects appeared after the destruction of the First Temple and the fall of Jerusalem, when thousands of Jews were driven out as exiles and slaves to Babylonia. We wish to stress that these fundamental changes in Judaic ideology, including otherworldly or monastic sects, appeared only during the lean period of Jewish history. This happened about eight centuries after the revelation of Moses, and after the heydays of Jewish life in the times of David and Solomon. But, it is very significant that despite the presence of somewhat pacifist or otherworldly cults and sects in Judaism, and despite about 2500 years of suffering and travail, the idea of Zionism, a virtual revival of earlier non-pacifist ideals, strongly reappeared in Judaism in the last century. And it is an important fact that Einstein, who says that his life was spent 'between politics and equations' was a staunch Zionist. So much so, that when Israel was formed he was offered its presidency.<sup>60</sup> However, apart from this apparent doctrinal ambivalence in its ideology, Judaism is a highly exclusive religion, not quite universal in its character, affinities and approach.

*Christianity:* The Judaic heritage of Christianity is undoubted. As in Judaism, in Christianity, too, there is, in principle, no dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. For, Christ emphasises both loving God with all one's heart, and loving one's neighbour as oneself.<sup>61</sup> But like Buddha, he also emphasises the pacifist principles, 'resist not evil' and 'turn the left cheek if hit on the right.' Religious history demonstrates that pacifist religions almost invariably become otherworldly, even if they were life-affirming in the beginning. Because of their religious pacificism, the Christians declined to take up service in the Roman army. In fact, historians like Gibbon and Sir

James Frazer have mentioned Christian otherworldliness as one of the major causes of the fall of the Roman Empire.<sup>62</sup> It is obvious that Christianity, which, like Judaism, was a religion of householders, showed, by the beginning of the 4th century AD, clear monastic trends.<sup>63</sup> Increasingly, monasteries and nunneries appeared as a significant development in the Christian religion. This life of monasticism, asceticism and nunneries led, on the one hand, to otherworldly quietist mysticism, and, on the other hand, to corruption and malpractices in the Catholic Church.

Consequent to this schism in the life of the Christian Church, ultimately arose the Reformation, causing a major blow to the supremacy of the Church and its role as the guiding moral force in the life of the Christian society. Lutheran and Calvinist reforms not only shattered the universal character of the Church, but also brought about its subordination to the national State. In addition, because of Luther's leanings towards the feudal princes, he took a very hostile and feudalistic stand against the rights of the peasantry. This landslide in the fortunes of the Church caused its gradual waning as a major moral influence in the socio-political life of the Christian societies. After the rise of science, which was considered to be the new elixir, it came to be believed that it would, in course of time, cure most human ills. The net result is that in the last 300 years, Renaissance, scientism, empiricism and secularism have virtually eliminated religion from the moral life of man in the West.

Toynbee says, "This transfer of allegiance from the Western Christian Church to the parochial Western secular state was given a positive form borrowed from the Graeco-Roman civilization by the Renaissance." "This unavowed worship of parochial states was by far the most prevalent religion in the Christian society."<sup>64</sup> Since the loss of supremacy of religion in the Christian society, Western life has lost its moral moorings. Nationalism, communism and individualism have been the unstable offsprings of this broken home. "Together with Darwinism, secularism and positivism, they have dehumanised the Western culture, reducing liberalism to a self-serving, highly competitive individualism."<sup>65</sup> By relegating religion to the background and having lost the moral springs of the Western culture, either utilitarian ethics has been accepted as an expedient substitute or a reductionist search has been made to find appropriate ethical elements in the life of the animals, or in the material base of man which is considered to be its fundamental constituent. And this search has finally come to the dismal conclusion that all ethical life is 'a defence

mechanism' or a 'reaction formation' to the impacts of the environment. After the Second World War, a third of the population of the world was living under the Communist system. As the century is closing, these countries find that despite the myth of dialectical movement and synthesis, the system has been unable to make any synthetic values or devise a system of ethics which is able to maintain cohesion within these societies. And it is the existence of this moral vacuum that made the Foreign Secretary of the Soviets proclaim that 'universal values should have priority over class, group or other interests.'<sup>66</sup> The warning remained unheeded, and the Russian Empire has collapsed, purely because of its inability to build internal cohesion. At the ethical plane, this decries, in a way, the validity of Darwinism, and its struggle for existence, and Marxism with its dialectical movement of class struggle. It involves equal condemnation of economic wars, cut-throat competition, consumerism and increasing disparities in capitalist societies.

From the point of view of internal cohesion, the position in the capitalist countries of the West is no better. Mounting number of divorces, broken homes, drug addiction, alcoholism, and individualism have created such a situation in North America, which made the Christian Church raised a strong voice saying that secularism was a common danger and needed to be eliminated as a social force, and that Christianity should seek the co-operation of other religions to combat its evil influence. Christianity had given to the empirical life in the West its cohesion, strength and elan; the divorce of religion from politics and the empirical life, has left secularism a barren institution without any hope of a creative future. This is the tragedy both of communism and capitalism. It is this tragedy with its dark future that the North American Churches wanted to avoid. But in the temper of the times, this voice of sanity was drowned in an exhibition of suicidal egoism of the European Churches who felt that "Secularization, not secularism, is the primary process. It is a process in which some of the values of Christian faith have been put into a secular framework, bringing about a powerful force which is destroying all old ideas. Hence, secularization is an ally, because it will destroy Hinduism, Islam and other forms of what they considered to be superstition. So, we should ally ourselves with secularization and see it as the work of God." Later, it was again repeated : "We do not feel that we have anything lacking. And so we are opposed to dialogue unless it is for the sake of testifying to Jesus Christ." "That was it. Then they passed a resolution saying that under no circumstances

should multi-religious dialogues be undertaken because multi-religious dialogues put Christianity on the same level as other religions, and this is unacceptable. So, because the European Christians had that point of view, the World Council of Churches has not been able to engage in multi-religious dialogues for quite some time.”<sup>67</sup>

This is the state of affairs of the moral life of man in Western countries that lead the dominant culture of our times. Recently, however, some priests in Latin America have raised a voice for an integrated and composite culture of Liberation Theology, invoking the Bible in support of a revolutionary struggle to help the poor. Father C. Torres states, “The Catholic who is not a revolutionary is living in mortal sin.”<sup>68</sup> Theologian Moltmann says, “Political theology wants to awaken political consciousness in every treatise of Christian theology. Understood in this way, it is the premise that leads to the conclusion that, while there may be naive or politically unaware theology, there can be no apolitical theology.” He concludes, “The memory of Christ crucified compels us to a political theology.”<sup>69</sup> But these are still minority voices in the Christian world.

## IslamIslam

Islam started with a full-blooded combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. It is this combination that swept everything before it and created an epoch which is unrivalled in its achievements. It is a religious system and culture, which is, in many respects, more comprehensive and unified than the parochial culture of the city states of Greece. It is hardly complimentary to the Christian world of the West that while today it seeks to fashion many of its cultural institutions on the basis of Greek classical models, yet these, but for the interlude of the Islamic epoch which preserved most of the Greek thought, would have been lost to posterity. Never was the concept of human brotherhood advanced, in thought and deed, on a scale as during this epoch. It speaks volumes for the liberalism of Islamic culture that the heydays of the Judaic literature, philosophy and thought synchronise with the countries and periods of Islamic rule. Not only were some of the Jewish classics written, but Maimonides, the king of Judaic philosophy, also flourished and wrote during the Muslim rule. As against it, under Christian rulers, the Jews suffered periodical massacres, persecution and the segregated life of the ghetto. Admittedly, the Muslim rulers were, by comparison, quite liberal towards the followers of other religions. Islamic contribution

to the scientific thought of the day was significant. But far more important is the contribution of men like Al Qushairi, Al Ghazali and Arbi to the religious thought of man.

There is, however, little doubt that mystic quietism and otherworldliness of Sufis is a growth that appeared during the time of later Caliphs, when they indulged in luxurious and un-Islamic living. It has happened in the case of Judaism and of Islam, both whole-life religions, that in times when religiously sensitive souls found it difficult to face the social or socio-political challenges, they withdrew themselves into the shell of quietism, otherworldliness, monasticism and asceticism. Sufi sects appeared all over the Muslim world, but they never posed a challenge to the oppression and misrule of the Muslim emperors or kings. In this respect, the Jewish prophets were quite bold in their criticism of Jewish rulers, including David and Solomon.

It is very significant, and shows the lofty spiritual status of the Sikh Gurus and the basic ideological affinity between the two religions, that a Sufi saint like Pir Buddhu Shah fought and sacrificed two of his sons for the cause of Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>70</sup> But it was the Sikh Gurus and not the Sufis who challenged the growing Mughal tyranny. This instance demonstrates that although as an organisation, Sufis had become otherworldly and failed to confront the major challenge of societal oppression in the Muslim empires, yet when the Sikh Gurus had actually taken up the challenge and the ideological struggle was on, the Sufi saint made it clear that, considering the tenets of Islam, on which side should be the sympathies of a pious person.

There are, however, some scholars like Iqbal and Abdus Salam who believe that like the otherworldliness of the Christians, as in the case of the Roman Empire, Sufis also became a significant cause of the decline of the Muslim cultural supremacy in the world. For, there is considerable truth in Dr Mohammad Iqbal's couplet : "Whether it be the facade of a great republic, or the domain of a glorious empire, if its polity is divorced of the religious component, the system is reduced to sheer Changezian barbarity and tyranny." Thoughtful and saner elements in the Muslim world seem to be disillusioned with the bankrupt Western Secularism, and are trying to revert to a reformed and composite culture of Islam.

Religious History and Creation of the Khalsa  
Religious History and  
Creation of the Khalsa

In our brief survey, we have indicated four categories of religious systems. The Indian systems are all dichotomous. To the second category belongs pacifist Christianity which, though it originally suggested the love of one's neighbour as oneself, has gradually but ultimately reduced itself to sheer Secularism, Individualism and Consumerism, bereft of any religious component. To the third category belong Judaism and Islam which started with a full-blooded combination of the spiritual life with the empirical life, but ultimately, under pressure of circumstances, bifurcated, on the one hand, into otherworldliness or mystic quietism, and, on the other hand, into the pursuit of worldly gains and sheer animal survival.

Sikhism belongs to a different or a fourth category of the religious systems. For the purpose of understanding, clarity and comparison, it will help us if we recapitulate the salient features of Sikhism. The Gurus say that the Basic Reality is creative and free. It has a Direction and a Will. It is the Ocean of Values, Destroyer of evil-doers, Benevolent and Beneficent. That Reality is Love and we can be at peace with ourselves and the world only if we live a life of love and fall in line with the Direction of that Reality. Though ego is God created and man is at present at the ego-conscious (*manmukh*) stage of development, it is his destiny to evolve and reach the stage of Universal or God-consciousness and work in line with His Altruistic Will, i.e., achieve the *gurmukh* stage of development, when alone he can 'be spontaneously moral' and 'live truthfully.' At the present, or the egoistic stage of his development, man cannot avoid conflicts and suicidal wars. It is a futile search to try and find the moral base of man either in the animal life or in the material constituents of man. Nor can reason, which is just a tool of the egoistic psyche, like any other limb of the individual, devise and give man a helpful ethics. God or the Basic Reality, which is Love, can alone be the source of the moral life of man. Ultimately, it is only God or *Naam*-consciousness, involving link with the Basic Fount of Love, that can lead to truthful living. That is why the Guru says, "*Naam*-consciousness and ego-consciousness cannot go together."<sup>71</sup> The two are contradictory to each other. It is a hymn of fundamental significance. For, ego-consciousness means man's alienation from the basic Force of Love. And, greater the alienation or isolation of man from his spiritual and moral source, the greater would be his drive towards destruction. Secularism as an institution represents that egoistic isolation. This trend, the Guru says, is inconsistent with the path towards link with

the Universal Consciousness, the spring of moral life. The Gurus have given a lead to man in this field. Ten Gurus or ten *gurmukhs*, lived the life of God-consciousness. In one sense, it is the life of one *gurmukh* completing a demonstration and furthering the progress of life and its spiritual evolution and ascent. Guru Nanak's thesis involved the integration of the spiritual life of man with his empirical life. This integration has to enrich life and society. Because of the earlier cultural and religious tradition, it took ten lives for Guru Nanak, the *gurmukh* or *Sant-Sipahi*, to demonstrate his thesis and role, and discharge his social responsibilities.

These socio-spiritual responsibilities involved not only the creation of a society motivated with new ideas, but also the completion of the five tasks Guru Nanak had indicated as targets before himself and his society. With every succeeding Guru, the ideal of *gurmukh* or *Sant-Sipahi*, as laid down and lived by Guru Nanak, unfolded itself progressively. It is a path of love, humility, service, sacrifice, martyrdom and total responsibility as the instrument of God, the basic Universal Consciousness moving the world.

A question may be asked as to why there have been ten incarnations of Guru Nanak in Sikhism, while in other religions there have generally been only one prophet. To us, four reasons appear quite obvious. First, in a society in which dichotomous religions stand deeply embedded and established for over three thousand years and which claims to have contributed asceticism and monasticism to the cultures of the rest of the world, it was not easy for a whole-life religion with its *miri-piri* concept to be acceptable and take firm roots in one generation. Second, the Sikh ideology did not involve individual salvation, or a *gurmukh* just living truthfully; but it also involved compulsively the creation of a society motivated with new aspirations and ideals. And this new orientation and conditioning could be done only by the process of creating a new ideology, embodying it in a new scripture, organising new institutions, socio-religious practices and centres of the new faith, and inspiring people, by the method of martyrdoms, into accepting a new ethical standard or morality and values. For, as Ambedkar<sup>72</sup> and Max Weber have stated, the Hindu society cannot be reformed from inside, and rid itself from the unjust system of caste and untouchability, because the *Varn Ashram Dharma* has the sanction of *Shashtras* and scriptures; and a Hindu while making caste distinctions and exhibiting caste prejudices never feels any moral guilt or abhorrence. Instead, he feels a real sense of religious and



moral satisfaction that he is observing his *Dharma* and *Shastric* injunctions. Hence, the inevitable necessity of creating a new ideology and Scripture with a new religious and socio-moral code of conduct. Third, even if the ideology and institutions had been there, the Sikh society would, like some reformed societies, soon have reverted to the parent society, if it had not successfully achieved the social targets discussed above, including those of creating a fraternal society of householders, of dislodging the political misrule, and sealing the North-Western gate of India against the invaders.

The fourth reason appears to be very important. Our survey of the major religions of the world shows that revealed systems which start with a combination of the spiritual life with the empirical life and even with clear social objectives, over a period of time, either shed their social ideals and become pacifist, otherworldly, or a salvation religion, or become dichotomous, bifurcating, on the one hand, into monasticism, and, on the other hand, into either political misrule and tyranny or sheer secularism. Sikhism does not stand any such danger of ideological decline or bifurcation, because of its gradual and firm ascent and unfolding. It shows the prophetic vision of Guru Nanak that he not only profusely and clearly defined all aspects of his life-affirming and integrated ideology, but also detailed the targets his society had to achieve. He laid the firm foundations of the institutions and the socio-religious structure his successors had to develop and complete. Guru Nanak defined his God not only as the Ocean of Virtues, but also as a *Sant-Sipahi* or the Destroyer of the evil-doers; and the ideal he laid down for the seeker was to be the instrument of the Will of such a God. Guru Arjun gave instructions to his son to militarise the movement and thereafter, as was explained by Guru Hargobind to Sant Ramdas,<sup>73</sup> his sword was for the protection of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant. While Guru Arjun, the first martyr of the faith, had confrontation with the empire and gave orders for militarisation, the subsequent five Gurus manifestly proclaimed and practised the spiritual ideal of *Sant-Sipahi*. So, whatever some votaries of pacifist or dichotomous ideologies or other outsiders may say, to students of Sikhism or a seeker of the Sikh ideal, there can never be any doubt as to the integrated *miri-piri* or *Sant-Sipahi* ideal in Sikhism. Because in the eyes of a Sikh, any reversion to ideas of pacificism, personal salvation or monasticism would be a manifest fall from the spiritual ideology laid down by Guru Nanak, enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib, and openly, single-mindedly and demonstrably

lived by the ten Gurus, culminating in the creation of the Khalsa, with *kirpan* as the essential symbol for resisting injustice and oppression. The *kirpan* essentially signifies two fundamental tenets of Sikhism, namely, that it is the basic responsibility of a Sikh to confront and resist injustice, and that asceticism, monasticism, or escapism, of any kind is wrong. Thus, the *kirpan*, on the one hand, is a constant reminder to the Sikh of his duty, and, on the other hand, is a standing guard against reversion to pacificism and otherworldliness. The extreme sagacity and vision of the Sikh Gurus is evident from the thoughtfully planned and measured manner in which they built the structure of their ideology and the Sikh society, epitomised in the order of the Khalsa. That is also the reason that so far as the ideology and ideals of the Sikh society are concerned, there cannot be any ambiguity in that regard. Hence, considering the manner in which the lives of the ten Gurus have demonstrated the Sikh way of life, the question of its bifurcation or accepting pacificism or otherworldliness does not arise. And this forms, we believe, the fourth important reason for there being ten Gurus and the closure of succession after the Khalsa was created.

### ConclusionConclusion

The summary of the Sikh ideology, in the background of the religious history of some higher religions, makes the viewpoint of the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh position very clear. The Gurus emphasise that at the *manmukh* stage of man's development, man is constitutionally incapable of avoiding injustice, wars and conflicts. Because, man is basically egocentric and stands alienated from the Fundamental Force (God) which is Love. So long as he does not link himself with the Flow of Love and fails to work in unison with it, his problems of clash, disharmony and tensions will continue. The diagnosis of the authors of *Limits of Growth* is also the same, namely, that unless man is able to shed his egocentrism, there appears little hope for peace and happiness in the world.<sup>74</sup>

The state is an instrument devised by man to curb the basic egocentrism or wickedness of individuals and power groups. But, politics divorced from the Fundamental Spiritual Force, or moral brakes creates the situation that the State or Establishment is seized by individuals and groups, who openly use and employ all the enormous means of the modern state for the satisfaction of their egocentrism, working to the detriment of the masses and the poor. And the more

backward or poor a country, the greater the oppression uninhibited secularism can do with the power machine of the state. The result, logically and unavoidably, is that the gap between the downtrodden masses and the oppressive elites goes on widening. This happens both within a state, and among the various national states. We wonder if anyone who is acquainted with recent history, can contradict this observation.

Rationally speaking, secularism is incapable of reversing the present trend, or finding a solution of the existing malady. The causes for this failure have been stressed by the Gurus. Reason being a tool or limb of the egocentric man (*manmukh*) and being unconnected with the Universal Consciousness or spirituo-moral base of man, it can never make the individual spontaneously altruistic. Hence, any search for a humanitarian ethics through empiricism, communism or secularism is doomed to failure. The hopes which science in the first decades of the century had raised, stand tragically shattered.

To us, materialism and morality seem a contradiction in terms. Similarly, dichotomous or life-negating religions are equally amoral in their social impact. It is because of the Indian religions being dichotomous that the unjust secular institution of *Varn Ashram Dharma* and caste could continue in the Indian society, and also have the approval of its scriptures. The study of the three Western religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam also furnishes the same lesson. The moment any of these societies became otherworldly, or showed dichotomous tendencies, the moral strength of the society to face the challenges of life became minimal. Or vice versa, the society became dichotomous, when it failed to face effectively the challenges of life. And, ultimately it is the moral stamina of a people or culture that by and large determines its survival. This is evident from the known history, both of Judaism and Islam. But for the subordination of religious institutions to the national state, following the Reformation, the triumph of secularism and scientism to erode the Christian ethical base from the Western life would never have been possible. The ethical field today is in complete disarray.<sup>75</sup> Since religion is the only source which could furnish the moral sap to maintain social cohesion, and Christian elan being at its lowest ebb, the twentieth century has witnessed the worst slaughter and butchery of tens of millions, both at the international and the national levels. Hitler, Stalin and Hiroshima are phenomena of the twentieth century secularism. The nations of the world are spending on arms a thousand billion dollars each year. It

is this dismal spectacle that had, on the one hand, forced the Soviets to talk of the 'priority of universal values over the class or group values', and, on the other hand, led the North American Churches to suggest co-operation with other religions in order to fight the common danger of secularism. For the present, either out of their ignorance, or for other reasons, the European Churches have overruled the American view. But, the problem remains and stands highlighted by thinking persons. Decades back, Collingwood wrote : "The discovery of a relation is at once the discovery of my thought as reaching God and of God's thought as reaching me; and indistinguishable from this, the performance of an act of mine by which I establish a relation with God and an act of God's by which He establishes a relation with me. To fancy that religion lives either below or above the limits of reflective thought is fatally to misconceive either the nature of religion or the nature of reflective thought. It would be nearer the truth to say that in religion, the life of reflection is concentrated in its intensest form, and that the special problems of the theoretical and practical life all take their special forms by segregation out of the body of religious consciousness and retain their vitality only so far as they preserve their connexion with it and with each other in it."<sup>76</sup> This statement presents the view that unless reason and religion are combined, or the spiritual life is combined with the empirical life of man, his problems will remain insolvable. Reason is incapable of devising or creating a moral force. Hence, the inherent incapacity of secularism to create any worthwhile values, much less universal values. The fall of the Russian Empire has made this clear.

Five hundred years ago, Guru Nanak emphasised that unless the spiritual component enriches the empirical life, man's problems of conflict, war and disharmony will remain. The solution lies in working in consonance with God's Will or the Basic Force of Love and Altruism. The brotherhood of man cannot be a reality without accepting the Fatherhood of God. For the Gurus, the Fatherhood of God or Force of Love or Universal Consciousness is not an assumption, but a reality. For them, it is a true and most indubitable experience, spontaneously leading to activity. It is an experience far more real than the sensory perception of external phenomena or the construction of a pragmatic or utilitarian ethics, or the assumption of a dialectical movement raised by human reason. The Gurus exhort man to follow the path of altruistic deeds to reach the next evolutionary stage of *gurmukh* or God-man. It is a worldview of combining the spiritual life with the

empirical life of man, thereby breaking the alienation from which man suffers. It is a worldview of total responsibility towards every sphere of life, the God-man's sphere of responsibility being co-terminus with the sphere of God. At a time when most of the higher religions have either become dichotomous, or are withdrawing from the main fields of social responsibility, and human reason feels frustrated, the Sikh Gurus express a comprehensive worldview of hope and eternal relevance. At the same time, it is important to state that, far from being exclusive, Sikhism is universal in its approach, always anxious and willing to serve and co-operate with those who aim at harmony among beings and welfare of man. For, the Guru's prayer to God is that the world may be saved by any way. He may be Gracious enough to do.<sup>77</sup> And, Guru Nanak proclaimed that his mission was, with the help of other God-men, to steer man across the turbulent sea of life.<sup>78</sup> This fundamental ideal stands enshrined in the final words of the daily Sikh prayer, "May God bless all mankind."

#### REFERENCES

- 1 Guru Granth Sahib, p. 459
- 2 Ibid., p. 294
- 3 Ibid., p. 955
- 4 Ibid., p. 8
- 5 Ibid., p. 859
- 6 Stace, W. T. : *Mysticism and Philosophy*, pp. 131, 133
- 7 Huxley, Aldous : *Moksha*, p. 175
- 8 Ibid., pp. 222, 223
- 9 Guru Granth Sahib, p. 830
- 10 Zimmer, H. : *Philosophies of India*, pp. 222-223
- 11 *Journal of Sikh Studies*, Vol. VII, February-August, 1980, p. 38
- 12 Ibid
- 13 Jain, N. K. : *Sikh Gurus and Indian Spiritual Thought*, p. 168
- 14 Jaiswal, Suvira : *Origin and Development of Vaisnavism*, pp. 116-118
- 15 Murthy, H. V. S. : *Vaisnavism of Shankradeva and Ramanuja*, p. 232
- 16 Juergensmeyer, Mark : *Sikh Studies*, pp. 83-88
- 17 Guru Granth Sahib, p. 473
- 18 Bhai Gurdas, Var 1
- 19 Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1
- 20 Ibid., p. 1412
- 21 Macauliffe, M. A. : *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. III, pp. 7-8, 419
- 22 Guru Granth Sahib, p. 7
- 23 Ibid., pp. 8-9.

- 24 Ibid., p. 62
- 25 Ibid., p. 113
- 26 Ibid., p. 473
- 27 Panjab Past and Present, October, 1976, p. 468
- 28 Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1243
- 29 Ibid., p. 730
- 30 Wilson, H. H. : Religious Sects of Hindus, p. 19
- 31 Briggs, G. W. : Gorakhnath and Kanphata Yogis, p. 32
- 32 Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1245
- 33 Ibid., p. 886
- 34 Ibid., p. 1171
- 35 Ibid., p. 889
- 36 Ibid., p. 417
- 37 Russell, Bertrand : History of Western Philosophy, p. 362-363
- 38 Dowley, Tim (Ed.) : Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity, p. 5
- 39 Guru Granth Sahib, pp. 360, 417-418
- 40 Ibid., p. 1028
- 41 Ibid., p. 224
- 42 Ibid., p. 145
- 43 Ibid., p. 1289
- 44 Ibid., p. 472
- 45 Bhalla, Sarup Dass : Mehmas Prakash, p. 326
- 46 Gupta, H. R. : History of the Sikh Gurus, p. 110
- 47 Sainapat : Gur Sobha, pp. 21, 32
- 48 Bute Shah : Tawarikh-i-Hind, pp. 405-406
- 49 Gurdev Singh : Sikh Tradition, pp. 183-227
- 50 Cunningham, J. D. : History of the Sikhs, p. 64
- 51 Guru Granth Sahib, p. 176
- 52 Ibid., p. 631
- 53 Ibid., p. 913
- 54 Ibid., p. 913
- 55 Ibid., p. 113
- 56 Hertzberg, Arthur (Ed.) : Judaism, p. 98.
- 57 Zvi Cahn : Philosophy of Judaism, pp. 503-504
- 58 Smart, Ninian : The Religious Experience of Mankind, pp. 356-358
- 59 Zvi Cahn : op. cit., p. 504 Roth. Cecil : Short History of the Jewish People, pp. 45-52, 57
- 60 Hawking, Stephen : A Brief History of Time, pp. 177-178

- 61 Bible : John, p. 15, Mathew, p. 22
- 62 Toynbee, Arnold, J. : *Christianity and Civilisation*, pp. 14-17
- 63 Dowley, Tim (Ed.) : *op. cit.*, pp. 204-207
- 64 Toynbee, Arnold, J. : *An Historian's Approach to Religion*, p. 210
- 65 Dowley, Tim (Ed.) : *op. cit.*, pp. 570-571
- 66 The Tribune : July 12-13, 1990
- 67 *Dialogue & Alliance* : A Journal of International Religious Foundation,  
Summer 1987, Vol. 1, pp. 94-96
- 68 Dowley, Tim (Ed.) : *op. cit.*, p. 610
- 69 Moltmann, J. *et al* : *Religion and Political Society*, pp. 19, 46
- 70 Panikkar, K. M. : *Hindu Society at Cross Roads*, p. 18
- 71 Guru Granth Sahib, p. 560
- 72 Ambedkar, B. R. : *Annihilation of Caste*, (an undelivered speech edited by  
Mulakh Raj Anand)
- 73 Gupta, H. R. : *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 1, p. 163
- 74 *Limits of Growth* : A report for the Club of Rome's Project. pp. 191-192
- 75 Schumacher, E. F. : *A Guide to the Perplexed*, p. 132
- 76 Collingwood, R. G. : *Idea of History*, pp. 314-315
- 77 Guru Granth Sahib, p. 853
- 78 *Ibid.*, p. 939

## 5

## SIKHISM : A MIRI PIRI SYSTEM

DALJEET SINGH

1. *Introductory*

There is little doubt that Miri Piri doctrine is an essential part of the Sikh religion. But, a misunderstanding that often exists, especially among scholars from pacifist religions, is that the doctrine was introduced or created by the Sixth Master. Because of that misunderstanding many extraneous or environmental interpretations have been devised to explain the seeming change in ideology. In this paper we seek to examine whether the Miri Piri combination in Sikh religion is fundamental to the system of Guru Nanak, or it is a subsequent addition made by the Sixth Master. For any examination of the issue the basic question is what is the Sikh world-view, and what is the nature of the spiritual experience of the Gurus and their definition of the Spiritual Reality. The second question is what is the relation of the Spiritual Reality to the empirical life of man. Because answers to these two questions determine the class and character of a religious system. For, in whole-life or Miri Piri systems like Sikhism, Islam and Judaism the answers to these two questions are quite different from those given by pacifist or dichotomous religions, like Vaisnavism, Christianity, Buddhism, etc. Since replies to these questions will mostly be ontological or theological in nature, we shall seek in this paper to state the views of the Gurus, as embodied in the Guru Granth Sahib, and as exemplified in their lives.

2. *Sikh Thesis*

The rationale of every religious system follows the kind of spiritual reality the author experiences. For the Guru, 'God is All Love, rest He is ineffable'<sup>1</sup>. And, God's love can be expressed only in a real world; besides, Love is both dynamic and the mother of all values and virtues. In the very opening line of the Japuji, God is called, 'The Creative Being', and further He is described as 'Ever Creative, watching His Creation with a Gracious Eye'.<sup>2</sup> The Guru



calls the world real and, 'The place for the practice of righteousness'?<sup>3</sup> God is the 'Ocean of values and virtues'; 'Eyes to the blind, milk to the child and riches to the poor'.<sup>4</sup> The Guru, thus, emphasizes four things. First, the world is real and meaningful, being the place for the practice of virtues. Second, God too is deeply interested in it. For, He not only looks after it with benevolence, but also expresses His Love and Attributes in this world. Third, this gives spiritual sanction to the moral life of man. That is why Guru Nanak lays down for the seeker the goal of 'carrying out the will of God',<sup>5</sup> God's will being altruistic and the fount of all values. The Guru further emphasizes this creative or activity aspect of his system when he says, 'Higher than everything is Truth, but higher still is truthful living'.<sup>6</sup> It is in this context that we understand Guru Nanak's call to the seeker, 'If you want to play the game of love, come with your head on your palm'.<sup>7</sup> Guru Nanak prescribes a methodology of deeds when He says 'that it is by our deeds that we are assessed in His Court'.<sup>8</sup> And, 'it is by our deeds that we become near or away from God'.<sup>9</sup> The above leads to the fourth principle, the most significant one, that there is an inalienable link between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. These four fundamentals form the very base of Guru Nanak's system which is radically different from the earlier Indian religions.

### 3. *Indian Background*

In all the earlier Indian religions whether Buddhism; Jainism, Vaisnavism or others, the dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life was an accepted fundamental. In fact, four features are an integral part of all life-negating systems, namely, asceticism, Sanyasa, or monasticism, the down-grading of women and celibacy, and Ahimsa. Whether the goal is Kaivalya, Nirvana or Mukti, in each case it is an ideal of personal salvation or isolation. Guru Nanak rejected all the above principles because his is a life-affirming system and his spiritual goal is to 'carry out the Will of God'. And, God's will is altruistic and for that matter, wholly Active and Creative. Here it might be asserted that the epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana and the Bhagvad Gita also recommend a life of activity. But, it is well known that the epics, as well as the Bhagvad Gita, fully accepted and sanctioned the Brahmanical system of caste and Varna Ashram Dharma,<sup>10</sup> and Lord Krishna asked Arjuna to fight because it was his caste duty to do so. But, Guru Nanak completely rejected caste and his first

act after his enlightenment was to take a low caste Muslim as his life companion.

Secondly, in systems that involve withdrawal from life or Sanyasa, celibacy and the consequent down-grading of women become natural features. It is so even with Vaisnavism and Bhagats like Shankradeva and Kabir<sup>11</sup> who do not recommend celibacy as an essential part of their systems. Similarly, Ahimsa or complete pacifism is a necessary ingredient of salvation religions or systems in which there is a dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. This dichotomy, we find, is an essential part of all monastic, life-negating or pacifist systems, in fact, of all Indian systems except those which recommend activity as a part of their caste duty. In the Indian systems the goal, as indicated already, is personal salvation, merger in or union with the Spiritual Reality. Such being the goal, other-worldiness, isolation from the activities of life or total or partial withdrawal from it, becomes a natural corollary. Consequently, problems of life and society cease to be the concern of the seeker who tries deliberately to disentangle himself from them.

#### 4. *Why a Radical Departure from Indian Religions*

Even a glimpse of the earlier Indian religious systems and of Guru Nanak's religion clearly shows the contrast of perceptions, methodologies, essentials and goals between the two. Guru Nanak's God is 'Ever Creative and Altruistic' and so is His goal set for the seeker, namely, of always carrying out His Attributive Will. Guru Nanak was the first man of God to break the dichotomy that existed among all the earlier Indian religions and, instead, to establish an inalienable link between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. It is only on the basis of this fundamental change that Guru Nanak brought about that we can understand his hymns about the attributes of God, the goal of man, emphasis on deeds, equality between man and man, and man and woman, the importance of householder's life, the necessity of work and sharing, his tirade against idleness, the definition of sin, the hymn about the cant of the so called piety of non-meat eating or Ahimsa,<sup>12</sup> and his criticism of every corrupt social functionary and institution, whether religious, social, official, administrative, or political, the tyranny of the invaders and the failure of the rulers to ensure safety of the people. His spiritual soul is so sensitive to injustice in every walk of life that he complains to God for allowing the weak to be oppressed by the strong.<sup>13</sup> His calling God 'the

Slayer of the villains, and Destroyer of the evil'.<sup>14</sup> has not only an anti-ahimsic import, but it also indicates clearly the role the seeker of his society has to play as the instrument of God. The Bani of Guru Nanak has three clear implications. First, that Guru's God and the seeker are deeply interested in the world, involving the combination of the spiritual with the empirical. Second, he makes a detailed survey of all aspect of the religious, social and political life around him and specifically identifies and criticises the evil spots therein. Third, during a life full of activity, he takes all tangible steps to found and frame a socio-religious structure and society that should scrupulously pursue the aims and objectives of his radically new system and world-view.

Our discussion and description given above make two things quite plain, namely, that Guru Nanak's religious system is entirely different from all the earlier religious systems, and, secondly, that the radical departure he makes is due to his intrinsically combining the spiritual with the empirical, thereby breaking the dichotomy that had existed in the earlier religious life in India. This break with the past was so great that the Naths were surprised and questioned Guru Nanak how he claimed to pursue a spiritual path while living a householder's life. The Guru's reply that the Naths did not know even the elementaries of the spiritual path is equally emphatic about the clear contrast between his world-view and those of earlier system.<sup>15</sup> While the reason for making the radical break with the past is plain enough, the actual contrast is so great that the failure fully to comprehend the significance of that break continued and continues even today, among students of religion, especially among votaries of pacifist religions. In fact, no understanding of Sikhism is possible unless the meanings, compulsions, and corollaries of this break with the past following Guru Nanak's spirituo - empirical world-view of life is clearly grasped.

##### 5. *Foundations of New Structure Laid*

The next issue concerns the practical and organisational methods Guru Nanak employed to implement his religious thesis. We shall see that while those methods are clearly in line with his system, those are like his religion, very variant from the methodology of the earlier religions. By taking Mardana, a low caste Muslim with him, he gave a sledge-hammer blow to the then existing caste hierarchy of Varan Ashram Dharma, and Hindu-Muslim antipathy. Besides, it stressed that Guru's system

was not only new and universal in its character, but it was neither Hindu nor Muslim in its basis. The second step he took was to organise, at places he visited, local Sangats of his followers who were ordinary householders drawn from all sections of the society, and who met locally at a fixed place called a Dharmshala for purposes of religious worship and training. The significant feature of these societies was that their members were not just seekers of personal salvation or Nirvana practising some esoteric discipline, but were ordinary persons wanting to follow the spiritual path while pursuing their normal vocations in life. This was, we find, completely in consonance with the system of Guru Nanak indicated above. Here it is important to mention that after his missionary tours Guru Nanak settled at Kartarpur with members of his family and started work as a peasant. By his personal example he stressed the importance of work and production and the sharing of it. The basic change Guru Nanak made was his emphasis on deeds and discarding ritualism. While addressing the Jogis, he told them that real Yoga lay in treating people equally rather than rubbing ashes on one's body;<sup>16</sup> or that real prayer was to be compassionate and do good works instead of doing ritualistic prayer.<sup>17</sup> Since Guru's followers were normal householders, for them the spiritual path lay in righteous living and not in following any tortuous ascetic or ritualistic routine of a system.

Another institution started by Guru Nanak was that of Langar which had a dual objective, one of breaking caste barriers and ideas of pollution, and the second of creating centres which fed the poor and the needy.

But, the most important step, indicative of profound implications, which Guru Nanak took was to select and appoint a successor in his lifetime. It meant, first, that Guru Nanak's aim was not merely to lay down the outline of a theoretical religious system but it was to organise a society which should accept the social responsibility of confronting, fighting and eliminating injustice and aggression in the socio-political field. Because, so far as the theoretical system was concerned, it had been fully prescribed in the Bani of Guru Nanak; the subsequent Gurus added nothing to it. But, his system was neither for a few, nor for an elite seeking spiritual attainments. He wanted to build a society with new motivations that should simultaneously pursue social and spiritual ideals, since the two could not be separated in his system. The appointment of a successor, thus, made it plain that the work of

creating a social and institutional structure and building a new society was till then incomplete. In the development and growth of the Sikh society, two things are important to study, first, whether or not the institutional build-up of the society made by the later Gurus was squarely based on the foundations laid by Guru Nanak; and second, whether during that period the activities undertaken and objectives pursued or achieved by the Sikh society were strictly in line with the spiritual ideals laid down by the first Guru. The thrust of Guru Nanak's system is evident from one significant event. When Guru Nanak went to meet Guru Angad at Khadoor Sahib he found that he was leading what he felt to be a life of somewhat isolation. Guru Nanak, therefore, advised him that his primary duty was to organise a mission and lead a new society.<sup>18</sup> This sheds a revealing light both on the system and the mission of Guru Nanak.

It is also significant that it is Guru Nanak who eliminated the hurdle of Ahimsa that stood in the way of a religious seeker from joining a righteous struggle against tyranny. In most of the socio-political systems, organisations or societies, the greatest instrument of injustice or oppression is many a time the Political Establishment. Since Guru Nanak wanted clearly to cultivate a high sense of social responsibility in his society, he very sagiously took the farsighted step of removing the handicap of Ahimsa from the path of the religious man; and described his God to be the 'Slayer of villains and the Destroyer of tyrants.' It is, thus, plain that Guru Nanak clearly envisages for his society a role, if necessary, of confrontation with an unjust Establishment whether social or political.

The next question is why did the Guru contemplate such a role for his society. The answer to this question already stands given, namely, that Guru's God is a 'Just Emperor' and embodies the roles both of Miri and Piri. Since the Guru and the seeker have to be the instruments of God's Will, they too have to play their part in both the spheres of life. Thus, the compulsion and the rationale behind the doctrine of Miri and Piri, is Guru Nanak's view of God and his essential combination of the spiritual life and the empirical life. An important corollary of this combination and the consequential Miri-Piri doctrine is the emphasis Guru Nanak laid on deeds and the moral life of man (Truthful living being the highest mode of living). Here it is necessary to state the contrast between the priority given to moral life in Sikhism and the virtual

lack of that emphasis in the Hindu way of life where 'all ethics is super moral i.e. it has not much to do with the empirical life of man'.<sup>19</sup> Thus Guru Nanak's combination of the spiritual with the empirical not only leads to the Miri Piri doctrine but also to his emphasis on deeds in the moral life of man. This principle implies two-fold duties of a Sikh both as an individual and as a member of the Sikh society to fight social evils. In sum, the life-affirming thesis of Guru Nanak meant that one should live in the social world and build it on the bedrock of a combination of the spiritual dimension of man with his empirical dimension. Thus, participation in the social life involved four sets of responsibilities, namely, of ensuring justice and equality between man and man, and between man and woman, of creating production and sharing it equitably, and, fourthly, of reacting against every injustice and wrong in the socio-political field both as an individual and as a society. In this context, Guru Nanak took three important steps. He laid down all aspects of his life-affirming spiritual thesis in his Bani. Second, he organised a society and by his personal example and leadership, he tried to educate and eliminate from it evils of caste and social discrimination. Third, he clearly identified the socio-political problems of injustice and oppression. Since political problems could not be solved in a short time, he identified them and laid down the target for his society to achieve. What we mean to imply is that Guru Nanak's strong criticism of the rulers and invaders and the oppression of the weak by the strong was not merely a piece of rhetoric. It was virtually a direction in which his society was to move and a target it was to achieve in due course of time. For, the target of supplanting an empire could not be achieved in a life-time. And, Guru Nanak specifically removed the religious inhibition of Ahimsa that existed for earlier Indian seekers of a religious life. He not only stressed that people did not know what was flesh and what was not flesh and what was sin and what was not sin, but also stated that life was there in every grain of food we take.<sup>20</sup> The clarification was essential to make for a prophet who wanted his society to take up political challenges. Two things are very significant about the revolutionary change Guru Nanak made in the religious life of his society. He wanted it to ensure justice and equality in the social field. Hence the necessity of production, equitable distribution, and equality in social status. Secondly, removal of socio-political oppression was also made a

target to be achieved by the Sikh society. It is, indeed, unfortunate that many a scholar has been unable to correlate the clear meaning and significance of three uncommon but emphatic facts. First is Guru Nanak's Babar Vani and his statement that a political system in which the strong oppress the weak is an aberration in the spiritual world of God. Second is his organisation of a society, and the appointment of a successor to develop, strengthen, and mature that society. Third is his elimination of the centuries-old constraint of Ahimsa for the spiritual seeker. We are not aware of any prophet or Bhagat, except Prophet Muhammad, who had specifically related these three points. But in a system in which the spiritual is combined with the empirical, this integration, as it happened, would evidently be natural and necessary, being the base of the Miri Piri world-view.

#### 6. *Developments during the Guru period*

Seen from the angle of the two objectives mentioned above, the Guru period may be divided into two parts, the one upto the time of the fifth Guru, and, the second thereafter. Here a word of caution. In describing the further growth of the Sikh society, we shall confine our narration only to two aspects of it mentioned earlier, namely, its organisation as a cohesive and responsible society and, second, its capacity to discharge its responsibility in the socio-political field. But it does not mean that the other aspects of the religious society and its members were not developed or taken care of.

Guru Angad took two important steps. First, he improved the Punjabi script so that it could suitably become a complete vehicle of Guru's spiritual message and thereby wean a way the Sikhs from the die-hard and caste-ridden tradition of the Sanskrit literature considered to be the sacred and sole vehicle of the Hindu spiritual tradition, with Brahmins as its exclusive masters and exponents. Secondly, he excluded the ascetics and other recluses from the Sikh society. It is clearly recorded that in his time the use of meat as food in the Langer or otherwise was accepted.<sup>21</sup> The Third Guru took three further steps, First, he made the institution of Langer so Important that no one, big or small, could see him or partake in his Sangat till he had given evidence of his anti-caste and anti-pollution views by partaking of food from the Guru's common kitchen. Second, he created 22 reaching and administrative centres for the organisation of the Sikh society in areas far and wide. Even women were appointed to head them.<sup>22</sup> Third, in order

to establish the separate identity of the Sikh society and to dissociate it from the Hindu practices and pilgrimages, he created a Bauli at Goindwal, where the Guru lived, as the alternate place for the religious visits, education, and regeneration of the Sikhs. The ministry of the fourth Guru lasted only for seven years, but he too made the momentous decision of founding Amritsar as the sacred centre of a new community, and developing a new township, which has since then played a crucial role in Sikh history. The role of the Fifth Guru is extremely important. He did the momentous work of compiling and authenticating the Sikh Scripture, thereby making the ideological break with the traditional Indian society complete and unbridgeable. It is in his times that the Sikh society had become 'a state within a state,'<sup>23</sup> in which the Guru was called the real emperor (Sacha Patshah). He asked Sikhs to work as traders who brought from the north-west of India horses for sale in the country. It was the Sikh society of the time of the fifth Guru that Jahangir felt could form a potential political challenge that needed to be nipped in the bud by the execution of the Guru.<sup>24</sup> The Guru not only accepted the challenge boldly, but by his martyrdom also prepared his people for the confrontation that he had initiated. And it was he who left instructions for his son to start military preparations for the ensuing struggle. Here it is significant to state that Guru Hargobind had started joining hunting parties even in the life time of his father.<sup>25</sup> The period of Guru Hargobind was of open militarisation and conflict with the Empire. At the time of his initiation as Guru, he donned two swords one of Piri and the other of Miri, thereby making it clear the future role the Sikh society was to play. Military training was started and even mercenaries were enlisted. There were open clashes with the forces of the state. A fort was constructed at Amritsar and Akal Takhat, the centre of political activity, was created side by side with Harmandir Sahib. Two flags of Miri and Piri were raised at the common compound between Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takhat, being the symbols of the doctrine of Guru Nanak combining spirituality with empirical life.

It is significant that the changes initiated by the fifth and the sixth Gurus in the Sikh life were deliberate and calculated. It is, therefore, naive to say that militarisation of the movement was in any way influenced by Jats in the Sikh society who were clearly in a small minority then.<sup>26</sup> In fact, a notable feature of this radical change the Gurus brought about in the course of the Sikh



movement and the Sikh practices is that while the Gurus were very clear and determined about their ideological direction and drive, even some of the Sikhs around them found it difficult, because of the old Indian religious and ascetic conditioning, to comprehend and follow their ideological significance. So far as the outsiders are concerned their lack of understanding it is epitomised by the question of Sant Ram Das of Maharashtra to Guru Hargobind (as earlier of Naths to Guru Nanak) as to how it was that while he called himself a successor of Guru Nanak, he was so anomalously wearing a warrior's armour and riding a horse. The Guru's reply, as was earlier the reply of Guru Nanak to Naths, was prompt and categorical. 'Guru Nanak had given up mammon and not the world. My sword is for the protection of the weak and destruction of the tyrant.'<sup>27</sup> It is relevant here to recall that it is Guru Nanak who first calls God the Destroyer of the tyrant and the villains. Initially, even men like Baba Budha, Bhai Gurdas and others not only failed to comprehend the true ideological implications of militarization, but they even tried to remonstrate with the mother of the Guru suggesting the risks of the Guru's policy. In fact, the ideological revolution Guru Nanak had brought about was so great that many scholars fumble in grasping the doctrinal unity of the lives and the practices of the ten Gurus. But, it is quite unfortunate that while they try to give a materialist explanation for this change, they almost invariably ignore or suppress the historical evidence left by Sant Ram Das about Hargobind's clear clarification of the militarization and the change he had deliberately initiated.

The seventh and the eighth Gurus not only pursued the policy of militarization, but the seventh Guru even went to the extent of meeting the rebel Dara and offering him military help.<sup>28</sup> Evidently, the Guru while he offered military assistance to Dara could not be ignorant or oblivious of the fate of the fifth Guru who had given some help to rebel Khuro. And yet, knowing this, he openly made the offer. All this demonstrates how clear were Guru Nanak and his successors about their ideology, and how, with a single-mindedness of purpose, they pursued their aims and objectives and executed their policy even though some of their own followers were sometimes slow in keeping pace with them or understanding and imbibing the spirit of the movement. No wonder outsiders had difficulties in properly appreciating the real message of Guru Nanak.

Just as the martyrdom of fifth Guru had synchronised with a

major- change in Mughal policies from Akbar to Jahangir, in the time of the ninth Guru, Aurangzeb's policy of Islamisation had become intensely oppressive in its execution. To shake the people out of their fear and timidity and to strengthen his own community for the major struggle ahead, the ninth Guru felt that the occasion was ripe for him to sacrifice himself for the faith. Here it is relevant to state that the Guru had clearly declined the offer of the emperor that if he desisted from political activities he would not be disturbed in his religious interests.<sup>29</sup> But the ninth Guru, whose Bani epitomises the tranquility of spiritual depth, chose to intervene and protest against religious persecution and attack by the Empire on the freedom of conscience in Kashmir. He was beheaded in Delhi in 1675 A.D.

After this martyrdom starts the final phase of the Guru period. Guru Gobind Singh was fully conscious of the trial that lay ahead. He organised and militarized his people and trained them in local wars in which he had to partake. Two features of this period come out very prominently. The Guru asked the hill princes to join his struggle against the Empire and make a common cause with him. But they declined to do so,<sup>30</sup> because the Guru stood for the equality of men and had broken all caste barriers which the hill princes wanted to preserve, as also their feudal interests. Not only that. Later the hill Rajas even invited the imperial forces to curb the Guru and joined them to attack and fight him. Evidently, the religious and ideological contrast between the Hindu hill princes and the Guru was complete. But, Pir Budhu Shah, a Muslim saint of the area, was ideologically so impressed by the spiritual stature of the Guru that he not only sent his followers to fight for the Guru, but two of his sons actually died fighting in the Guru's army. These two events, on the one hand, bring out the ideological and religious gulf between Guru Gobind Singh and the old Hindu tradition of Rajput hill princes. On the other hand, these show that the Guru's mission and his struggle for the cause of man were such as to command the affection and affinities of even a Muslim Sufi saint.

It was on the Baisakhi day of 1699 A.D. that the Guru did the epitomic work of creating the Khalsa and revealing the prime object of his mission.<sup>31</sup> In many ways, it was a momentous day. He selected the five beloved leaders of the community on the basis of their willingness to sacrifice their all for the Guru's cause. Four of these belonged to what the Hindus called the Sudra castes. In order to establish the Khalsa brotherhood, the Guru first baptized

(performed Amrit ceremony) all five of them and later requested those five to administer Amrit to the Guru himself. The Guru gave five freedoms to his Khalsa (Dharam Nash, Karam Nash, Bharam Nash, Kul Nash, Kirat Nash).<sup>32</sup> It involved a complete break with the past traditional religions, customs, social prejudices, and structures. It was a stage when the Guru felt that the Sikh community had become mature, self-reliant and responsible enough to fight the socio-political injustices and battles of life that lay ahead. A momentous socio-political confrontation had started with the greatest empire of the day. In that struggle the Guru lost his mother and all his four sons. Yet the confrontation was continued by the Guru undismayed and he sent Banda Singh to invade the Mughals in Punjab.

The mission of Guru Nanak was fulfilled, a religiously motivated casteless and classless brotherhood, the Khalsa, had been created to fight for righteousness and against all socio-political injustices. In 1708 A.D. the Guru passed away, leaving the Guru Granth as the spiritual guide of the Sikhs and the Khalsa as the active instrument of conducting the ideological battles of life. This dual succession epitomises the combination of the spiritual with the empirical system of Guru Nanak and the consequent unity of Miri Piri doctrine. It would be naive to suppose that further succession was stopped because the Guru had no progeny or for any like reason. The succession was stopped because Guru Nanak's mission of creating a religious society, fully earth-aware, socially and morally responsible, and ever ready to fight injustice and oppression had been created. It is in this perspective that the history of the Sikhs has to be understood and viewed.

#### *7. The Post Guru Period*

The socio moral organisation and society the Guru had created bore one of its fruits in the half century following the demise of the Tenth Master. In 1710 A.D., the Sikh forces, led by Banda captured Sirhind a strong imperial province in the north of India. The Mughal campaign and attacks against the Sikhs started in full swing. A price was put on every Sikh head and twice it was reported. that all Sikhs had been exterminated.<sup>33</sup> It is during this very period that Abdali, the greatest general in the East, started his invasions of India; and Sikhs as the self-reliant and responsible community of the area had to face and confront him,. They had no state or political organisation of their own, nor had they any trained

leadership as in the Guru period. But, despite persecutions by the state, and pressures from the invaders, the Sikhs as ideologically fired and intensely motivated guerillas, triumphed to form a state of their own in the area. After their success they upset the Zamindari System and distributed land among the tillers of the soil. It was a land-mark Socio-economic revolution which has structured the strength of the community and the Punjab masses. A remarkable achievement of the Sikh forces, despite these having suffered the worst persecution, and, which drew admiration even of their opponents, was their humane treatment of men and women of their defeated adversaries in war.<sup>34</sup> This conduct of the Sikh soldiers in victory was such as no modern army has been able to equal so far. It is nothing short of a miracle that a leaderless community, without any state, and drawn from the lowest sections of the society was able successfully not only to supplant the empire of the day, but also to repel the greatest invading general of the time and to seal the north-western border against all future inroads into India. Ranjit Singh's rule was, by all standards, fair and tolerant towards all communities, and humane to the extent that he never found it necessary to sentence even a single person to death, not even those who attempted to murder him.

The struggle of the Sikh society for basic rights of man during the British and the Independence periods of history has been equally outstanding. The first two rebellions against the British, the Kuka Rebellion and the Ghadar Rebellion, were almost wholly manned by the Sikhs. While the Sikhs form only two percent of India's population, during the struggle for Indian Independence, of the 121 persons hanged, 2644 imprisoned for life, and 1300 massacred in the Jallianwala Bagh protest meeting 93,2047 and 799 respectively were Sikhs. Again, of the soldiers who fought under Subash Chander Bose in the Indian National Army, 60% were, Sikhs.<sup>35</sup> In 1975, when the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, imposed the Emergency Law, curtailing all human rights, the Sikhs were the only people who sustained and organised a struggle against this invasion on all human freedoms, involving the arrest of over 40,000 Sikhs, when, in the rest of India, not even half that number offered arrest as a protest. It is necessary to state that particularly all these movements initiated by the Sikhs against the state were executed from the precincts of Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple and Akal Takht Complex) Amritsar.

The point of importance is why a small and insignificant

community is always in the vanguard to make tremendous sacrifices and struggle whenever it is a question of a guarding human rights and freedoms. And the sense of their earth-awareness and social responsibility is significant enough to make them create bountiful production not only to feed and sustain the population of their own state, but also to contribute each year over 60% of the central food reserve that feeds all the deficit areas in the rest of the country. Evidently, it is believed that these achievements are due to the thesis of Guru Nanak combining the spiritual life of man with his empirical concerns, thereby breaking the dichotomy that had existed in the earlier Indian religious systems. It is the thesis of Guru Nanak that the empirical life of man dissociated from his spiritual dimension reduces itself to stark egocentrism, individualism and materialism, leading to perpetual clash and conflicts in the human society. In the same way spiritualism divorced from the empirical life is just barren, ending in escapism and a kind of selfishness for individual salvation.

#### 8. *The Western Scene*

In this background we shall now discuss the ideological place and relevance of Secularism, as an institution, which has gained a growing recognition in the western culture in the last two hundred years. Since the days of Constantine, in the Christian society, the Church was considered supreme and gave legitimacy to the kings and political institutions of the state. But, the unfortunate fall in the moral life of the Church gave rise to Protestantism and Calvinism in the 16th century. The Reformation while it purified and shook life in the Church, brought about a major change in the equation between the Church and the State, or between the religious life and the empirical life of man. For, it once for all brought about the supremacy of the national State over the Church, which ceased to be universal, and became virtually a limb of the national State. During a war between two national states, the position of Church became quite anomalous, and each Church prayed for the success of its own State. As Toynbee laments, the Graeco-Roman ideal of the worship of the National State as the goddess was revived and accepted.<sup>36</sup> This was the first major blow the Church Universal suffered at the hands of the State following the Reformation.

The second slow but major erosion of the power and the status of religion took place with the rise of Science, Darwinism, Evolutionism and empiricism. The unstable marriage between Religion and the State gave rise to the off-springs of Monopoly

Capitalism in the West, and Communism in the East. The heady wine of power which Science and Technology gave to man so clouded his vision and sense of proportion that religions came to be considered an area of darkness which Science would duly probe, explore, and clear. All progress of man was measured by the power over nature it gave to him. Without realising the inherent limitations of the scientific method in the field of religion and values, its use became so pervasive and dominant even in the field of humanities that ontology virtually lost its hold, and the study of phenomena became an end in itself. Human evolution was deemed dependent on a chance mutation and the definition of values that made for survival ended in mere tautology. Mechanical methodology or reductionism became the standard mode of understanding and interpretation even in the field of religion and the so called social sciences. As with Pavlov and Skinner, human behaviour came to be studied on the basis of animal behaviour, and the phenomena of biology came to be understood on the basis of 'Physics and Chemistry'.<sup>37</sup> Human free will became just a quirk of atoms, and 'works of art' were sought to be understood 'in terms of animal behaviour'.<sup>38</sup> No where was confusion more apparent than in the field of ethics.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, the spiritual dimension of Reality ceased to have any fundamental meaning; nor could this aspect of man be the subject of any serious academic study, except as a piece of external phenomena or as a part of social history. Slowly but naturally, Individualism and Consumerism gained social relevance as worthwhile values and Secularism became a part of state policy.

But the two world wars within a period of two decades have shaken the scientific man's faith in himself and the ideal of a continuous linear progress the West was seeking to pursue. It became increasingly clear that if the scientific assumption of the space-time continuum being the complete base of our universe was true, we were living in a world that was wholly void of values and completely amoral in its structure. Values were considered mere utilitarian tools of human creation without any fundamental base or validity. In the wake of this mood of introspection came the warning from the authors of the Limits of Growth that our world system was neither abundant enough nor generous enough to permit for long our self-serving ego-centrism to continue recklessly on the path of aggressive, narrow and suicidal individualism or nationalism.<sup>40</sup> A decade earlier Toynbee had already sounded the

note 'wondering whether the technologist's professional success had not been a social and moral disaster' and whether he had not placed in the hands of the naked ape the power to destroy the human race.<sup>41</sup> These were lone voices, but in the socio-political field the mad race of Goliaths went on with the lolly-pops of Consumerism being offered to lull the peoples at large. On both sides of the line between Capitalism and Communism increasing symptoms of alcoholism, drug addiction, divorces, broken homes and unbalanced children have appeared in the life of man. The basic issue remains, whether man's rational and moral faculties arise from the same Base of Reality which is the subject of scientific study and is material, neutral and amoral in its structure. With the growing impact of Naturalism and Evolutionism, the landslide which had started with the Reformation, making Religion to be the hand-maid of the State, ended in a virtual divorce between the State and Religion in the conduct of the empirical life of man. Instead Science sanctified, on grounds of dealing with a political world, a close liaison between the State and its new-found Secularism, giving unbridled and uninhibited opportunities to the politicians to serve and satiate their individualism and ego-centrism. It is in the resultant suffocating climate that a person like Galbraith has raised the protest that in the American and British politics greed had openly started masquerading as morality. But, the greatest danger in the modern West is the Frankenstein of a mighty military machine which each national secular State is creating under the garb of ensuring security of its people. Increasingly it has been felt and feared that besides the stranglehold of the military machine, the modern state has an enormous power and subtle and pervasive means of influencing, enervating, and debasing the minds of its people. A day may come, when it would become impossible for the harassed people to dislodge this self-seeking Secularism from the driver's seat and control.

In this dismal scene there are visibly some welcome developments. The social stagnation in Latin America and Africa has given rise to Liberation theology. It invokes the Bible for its moral sanction and empiricism for its rational analysis. It seeks to highlight the fundamental fact that Christ's primary dictum of love for one's neighbour becomes meaningless if the man of religion is unable to confront every instrument of injustice and aggression against the weak. And the State, as in the past, sometimes becomes the greatest instrument of oppression, involving cold

extermination of millions of its own peoples. Second, there is a growing realisation that it is sheer moonshine to talk of the brotherhood of man without accepting the fatherhood of God, or that God, as Christ says, is Love. Accordingly, the American Churches have raised a clear voice that in order to fight the menace of Secularism, Christianity should invite the cooperation of all Higher Religions in the world.<sup>42</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In this context, let us have a look back at Guru Nanak's system. He made it clear that the fundamental Reality was not amoral but it was the Ocean and Fount of all altruism. Thus, the contrast between Scientism, with its methodology of mechanism or reductionism, and Sikhism with its whole-life approach of the inalienable and fundamental link between the spiritual component and the empirical component of man, is quite clear and complete. In Guru Nanak's view ego-centrism is our constitutional handicap. It is man's chief malady that obstructs his vision from taking a universal world-view. The Adi Granth and the lives of the Gurus make the Sikh position on the issue abundantly clear. The Miri-Piri ideal is an integral symbol and projection of the unified thesis of Guru Nanak and his successors, who have demonstrated its spiritual validity by their very lives. The domain or source of values is the spiritual or the transcendent level of Reality. We shall never find altruism, if we follow the reductionist or the mechanical method of going down the road from biology to physics or from man to the ape, the amoeba, or its genes. We can, at best, talk of a logical or constructed ethics, but we can neither live it nor participate in it voluntarily or spontaneously. The Gurus say that the way forward is to go the path of altruism and combine the spiritual with the empirical, and not the way of dichotomy or of secularism the modern sceptical mind is pursuing. The secular path will inevitably lead to stagnation and discord.

The spiritual path through altruism is for the development of a higher consciousness to enable us to perceive that the Basic Reality, as the Gurus say, is All Love. In Sikhism, we conclude, there is no place for dichotomy between the spiritual and the empirical, and the humble hand of friendship and cooperation has to be extended to every one who believes in Transcendence as the Base or Cause of Love, Altruism and life. And, in life one cannot be a disinterested bystander, since withdrawal is to help the opponents of God's Will, namely, ignorant egoists or Manmukhs.



Hence the fundamental validity of Guru Nanak's Miri-Piri or whole-life religion.

## REFERENCES

1. Guru Granth Sahib, p.459
2. *Ibid.*, p. 8
3. *Ibid.*, p. 468
4. *Ibid.*, p. 830
5. *Ibid.*, p. 1
6. *Ibid.*, p. 62
7. *Ibid.*, p. 7 1412
8. *Ibid.*, p. 26
9. *Ibid.*, p. 8
10. Annie Besant, Bhagavad Gita, pp. 252-254
11. Murthy, HVS, Vaisnavism of Shankradeva & Ramanuja, p. 232 Juugenmeyer. M., Sikh Studies, Berkley, pp. 83-88
12. Guru Granth Sahib, pp. 1289-90
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 417-18
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 145,224,1028
15. Bhai Gurdas, Var, I
16. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 730
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-41
18. *Mehma Parkash I*, p. 326, 11, p.9
19. Maitra, S.K.: *Ethics of Hindus*, pp. 244, 263-66
20. Guru Granth Sahib; p. 472,1289
21. Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mehma Parkash Part-II*, pp. 49,64
22. *Punjab Past and Present*, Oct. 1976, p. 468
23. Gupta, H.R., *History of Sikh Gurus*, p.110
24. *Ibid.*, p. 102-110
25. *Gur Bilas Patshahi Chhevin*, pp. 84-85
26. *Punjab Past and Present*, Vol. III, 1969, p.69
27. Gupta, H.R., *History of Sikh Gurus*, p.114
28. Daljeet Singh, *Sikhism*; pp. 277-78
29. Bannerji, A.C. *Journal of Sikh Studies*, GND University, vol. II, No I (Feb., 1976), p.61
30. Jagjit Singh, *Sikh Revolution*, p. 177
31. Sainapat, *Guru Sobha*, pp. 21,32

- 32 Gupta, H.R., History of Sikh Gurus, p. 189
- 33 Ibid., History of Sikhs, Vol. I, pp.27-32, 71-72, 82-83, 176-77, 261, Forster, p.312-13
- 34 Qazi Noor Muhammad, Jangnama; pp. 172-75; Gupta, H.R., History of Sikhs, p.290
- 35 Rajinder Puri, Rediscovery of India, p.21
- 36 Toynbee. A., An Historian's Approach to Religion, p.210
- 37 Smith Haston, Beyond the Post Modern Mind; p.136, Francis G, of Molecules and Men, Seattle University of Washington Press, 1966.
- 38. Ibid., P. 136
- 39 Schumacher, E.F., A Guide for the Perplexed, p.132
- 40 Limits of Growth, Report for Club of Romis Project, pp. 191-192
- 41 Toynbee, A., An Historian's Approach to Religion, pp. 233-35 42.
- 42 *Dialogue and Alliance*; Summer, 1987, Vol. I, No. 2, p.95

## 6

# POLITICAL IDEAS OF GURU NANAK, THE ORIGINATOR OF THE SIKH FAITH

GURTEJ SINGH

A brief appraisal of the opinions of historians of the Sikhs and prominent writers about the political concerns of Guru Nanak, may form a proper beginning of the present undertaking.

Early historians of the Sikhs generally refused to read a political content in the message of Guru Nanak.<sup>1</sup> It is not a coincidence that these are also the supporters of the contemporary British Empire<sup>2</sup> It appears that Cunningham was the first to doubt the veracity of such observations and speaking of Guru Arjan, wrote, "he was the first who clearly understood the wide import of the teachings of Nanak, or who perceived how applicable they were to every state of life and to every condition of society".<sup>3</sup> Indu Bhushan Banerjee while agreeing that, "the future Sikh nation grew on the foundations provided by Nanak" would not assent with Cunningham that "Guru Nanak had some original distinctiveness which alone could provide the basis of the nation",<sup>4</sup> This position runs counter to the underlying thesis of his book and can, in part, be legitimately attributed to his desire to save Guru Nanak for Hinduism as a reformer within its fold.

Arnold Toynbee held Guru Hargobind responsible for violating the "spiritual trust" of his predecessors by entertaining vulgar worldly ambitions" and for transforming the "embryonic church into embryonic state".<sup>5</sup> It is however apparent that he was under a compulsion to fit Sikh history into a framework he had contrived for it. It is now fairly well established that his views in this regard are inadequate as well as untenable even within framework of his own formulation.<sup>6</sup>

Generally it is true to say that those who were able to distinguish "that Sikhism should be regarded as a new and separate world-religion rather than as a reformed sect of Hindus"<sup>7</sup>

are the same who also could appreciate “something positive and realistic” about Guru Nanak’s work which is indicative of “a religion and a state”.<sup>8</sup>

Sikh *literati* including men of history, literature, philosophy and theology have always been more explicit and have all along discerned pronounced political currents in the thought of Guru Nanak. Ganda Singh considers him to be “the founder of the militant church of Sikhism”.<sup>9</sup> Along with Teja Singh, he is of the opinion that during the entire period of development there was “no break, no digression in the programme of Sikh life”.<sup>10</sup> Mohan Singh, studying the writings of Gurus, could discern only “difference of accent” from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>11</sup> Sita Ram accepts Babarvani verses to be the “first.....voice against oppression”<sup>12</sup>

Sher Singh dealing with the philosophy of Sikhism, opines that inspite of the development of two hundred years, the basic doctrinal truths, which had been preached by Guru Nanak, remained the same.<sup>13</sup> Kapur Singh observes about the formation of Khalsa that “it was a logical development and entelechy of the teachings of Guru Nanak”.<sup>14</sup> Kartar Singh sums up the generally held view about the political concerns of Guru Nanak when he says that he would have reacted to oppressions sword in hand like Guru Gobind Singh if he likewise had the nation at his back.<sup>15</sup>

Any analysis of Guru Nanak’s views must begin by first noting his emphatic claim to prophethood. Disclaiming a worldly preceptor, he accepted God as a original and true Guru to be his sole Teacher.<sup>16</sup> Claiming direct and intimate touch with Reality, he asserted that he had been specifically commissioned by God to disseminate Knowledge of the Divine.<sup>17</sup> While emphasizing direct inspiration he goes to say, ‘I have been given a permanent revenue free grant by God himself and others who claim spiritual status are mere temporary tenants’.<sup>18</sup> Everything that he uttered was therefore directly inspired and explicitly sanctioned by God.<sup>19</sup> It could hardly be otherwise, for, ‘One may speak of Him if one has seen the unseeable One, or else preaching is to no purpose.’<sup>20</sup> His mandate to interpret the Will of God was upheld and his status of a prophet was insisted upon by the succeeding Gurus<sup>21</sup> and Sikh theologians including Bhai Gurdas and Mani Singh.<sup>22</sup> “The Truth which filled his mind was not borrowed from books; it came to him as illumination of his entire life”, and while scholars wrangle loudly over the questions of influences,” so says

Nanak, so says Nanak is the burden of his songs".<sup>23</sup>

Political views of the Guru are also intimately connected to his acceptance of this world as real and a legitimate sphere of activity for a man of religion. He realized that the 'Omnipresent One lives in His creation and pervades it in all directions.'<sup>24</sup>

Wherever he looked he 'found the Merciful one whose very shadow the earth is'.<sup>25</sup> Guru therefore denounced asceticism and advocated the fulsome life of a house-holder setting the example himself by, in addition, accepting the secular professions of a civil servant and an agriculturist. His concern for the material world was as great as his preoccupation with the spiritual one and he essentially sought to secure the next by worth while social and political activity in this<sup>26</sup> 'Those who serve others in this world are respectfully received in the next'<sup>27</sup> Guru reproached Bhangarnath for having renounced the world and held life in society to be a precondition for spiritual attainment.<sup>28</sup> His favourite expression for ideal balance is that one must live unsoiled by the dross but in the midst of everything as the swan lives in water without getting wet.<sup>29</sup>

In relation to activity in this world, the most significant and frequent description of God by Guru Nanak is in a vocabulary befitting an emperor.<sup>30</sup> He consistently addresses Him as "my king, true king, and king of kings, He has his court, His throne and His palace. He is the sole Sovereign and sole Wazir. He has his eight-metal coin, the Word. To Him belongs real command; all power and praise belong to Him alone Indeed to find honour in His court is the aim of human life".<sup>31</sup> God is the only Sovereign entitled to the allegiance of mankind.<sup>32</sup> True Sovereign performs truly sovereign functions of destroying the evil doers<sup>33</sup> and of promoting the good.<sup>34</sup> He dispenses even handed justice. Together, these constitute the aim of all earthly political activity.

Essentially because soul's innate and intense desire to know God and to become one with His cannot be fulfilled otherwise. There are several passages of the Guru describing this yearning.<sup>35</sup> Those who feel no such yearning are termed as animals wrapped In human skin.<sup>36</sup> As a Guru the knower of Reality, he prescribes that for successful catering of this divine inclination of the soul, a seeker must here and now attain the status of a liberated one. In terms of individual personality and psyche, the exercise seeks the complete and absolute transformation of both. The process is variously expressed by Guru Nanak as that of 'rust being turned

into gold'<sup>37</sup> of 'ghosts and animals being transformed into angels'<sup>38</sup> and of 'a crow becoming a swan.'<sup>39</sup> This miracle according to the Guru is to be attained by successfully imbibing attributes which the knowing Guru has revealed to be those of God. For a human being that is the only method of living in God. The unusual metaphor describing the state is, 'companions of the Guru have become philosopher's stone on coming in contact with philosopher's stone'.<sup>40</sup> There are specific references in the form of particular illustrations like the suggestions that by contemplating on the Fearless One, one becomes fearless. The culmination is to become like the One you serve.<sup>41</sup>

There is much in Guru Nanak which establishes that the vital process must remain a dead letter unless political conditions conducive to it prevail. Victims of Babar's invasion for instance are in no position to serve God.<sup>42</sup> The opportunity is also denied to those overrun by an alien culture.<sup>43</sup> The Guru is emphatic that no religious activity under such circumstances is possible at all. It is obviously the duty of a God-oriented man to take effective measures so that such contingency does not arise. Significantly, he rules out divine intervention for the purpose.<sup>44</sup> The obligation to perceive evil and to engage it in battle with a view to eradicating it is solely that of a man of God. Guru is not averse to the use of force for the purpose and advocates active resistance in even contest; he deplores that the natives did not repel the sinning hordes of the invader Babar.<sup>45</sup>

Those who are called upon to rule too have their obligations. Nothing comes to anyone as a result only of his striving, by performing penances or by observing rituals but in accordance with His will (*hukam*) and by His grace (*nadr*). He creates everyone;<sup>46</sup> elevates as well as degrades.<sup>47</sup> Rulers must be spiritually wide awake people, who constantly live in values derived from revealed attributes of God, otherwise they are base pretenders.<sup>48</sup> Firm commitment to justice and equity alone makes rulership legitimate. The exercise of sovereign power must also be free of evils pointed out by the Guru. There are loud and strong suggestions in Guru Nanak which indicate that a ruler loses the right to rule when he fails to comply with the above requirements.<sup>49</sup> This loss of mandate is to be taken seriously by men of religion who must execute the command.

It is in the context of the above discussion that some of the most poignant political comments of Guru Nanak must be

interpreted. He has mentioned martyrdom in war amongst the accepted modes of attaining salvation.<sup>50</sup> He is certain that under certain circumstances it is more honourable to resist and die than just to live on.<sup>51</sup> Most significantly he recommends dying for a cause of God stating a person who dies thus attains *summum bonum*.<sup>52</sup> In an oft repeated couplet he requires a lover of God, to be ready to sacrifice his head on the path of love.<sup>53</sup>

In an ideal political set up, grave duties are cast upon a man of God. He must fully appreciate the conditions under which a mandate to rule is granted. It is his pious religious duty to discern when it has been violated. There is also no doubt that the attainment of *summum bonum* by him squarely depends upon his promptness and willingness to execute the command of God withdrawing the mandate. No sacrifice is to be considered too great for the purpose. If one shirks one's duty in this regard, one is no man of religion, does not live in the light of God and exists only at the animal level wasting the unique opportunity given for salvation.

From his utterances it is possible to precisely enumerate some of the evils the Guru would like the people to resist. Denial of justice, oppression, arbitrary curtailment of right to life, dishonouring of women, plunder, undermining the accepted social norms of a cohesive group are amongst the specific forms of evil the Guru abhors. Many of the above are mentioned in the Babarvani verses.<sup>54</sup>

*Conclusions:* The most significant single factor in the political thought of Guru Nanak is the firm belief that an individual cannot tread the spiritual path alone, that eventually salvation outgrows the bonds of personal relationship of the individual with God and must take the society, social and political organisations into account. His teachings which make life in society a pre-condition to spiritual fulfilment, exclude the possibility of regarding the highest worldly position as incompatible with the purest spiritual life in fact, it is possible to suggest that Guru Nanak considers politics to be the ultimate test of faith.

For Guru Nanak the sole aim of individual existence on earth is the attainment of the highest spiritual status or consciousness. Consequently, the ultimate aim of social and political activity as envisaged is to facilitate its attainment. Accordingly, for him, such activity becomes meaningful and relevant if it seeks the spiritual welfare of the people and only in proportion to the extent it serves

to bring it about.

He, however, denies to the state the power to regulate matters of spirituality or conscience. He resents such interferences by the contemporary state and some of his most vehement denunciations are in this context.<sup>55</sup> He advocated that the primary allegiance of a man of God must be to righteousness, truth and conscience and denied the claim of the state exclusively to rule over the souls of its citizens. His ideal appears to be a sovereign individual in the image of God he worships and imitates as a matter of religious discipline. Constituted as it was, political authority is consistently disregarded by him and is held directly responsible for many ills of contemporary society. On emerging from the river Vein after receiving his commission to prophethood, he made a statement repudiating allegiance to a temporal power. The messengers came and said, 'Nanak the Khan has summoned you' and Baba Nanak replied, 'he is your Khan, what do I care for him.'<sup>56</sup> It was perfectly in line with his pronouncement: 'he who stands in the presence of God needs to bow to no other.'<sup>57</sup>

From heartfelt laments about violation of other people's culture by powerful aliens, which abound in Guru's *bani*, it is legitimate to conclude that Guru's concept of basic political organization revolves around the cultural cohesiveness of a people. He would have society as a conglomeration of such units with inviolate autonomy existing freely and so regulated as to be without an inclination or an opportunity to violate any other similar unit.

Guru Nanak is imbued with the concept of intrinsic worth of human personality. He believes that an individual, with the help of God, can transcend his baser self. He is certain that by right conduct, incessant striving, rigorous discipline and God's grace, an individual can lift himself to divine status. That is the *gurmukh*, the *sadh*, the *jiwan mukta*, the ruler or *panch* - in a word the ideal man. of Guru Nanak and Guru Granth.

God as love stands for peace and harmony in his creation. It is His Will that those who love him must not await a miracle to restore peace. It is the knower of the Will, the *gurmukh*, who must execute it and restore normalcy. He must be the shelter of the shelterless, a refuge for the weak, as God showers His grace where the weak are supported.



## REFERENCES

- 1 For instance, Sir Charles Gough accuses other writers of Sikhs of telling "more than they knew". And though he himself wrote less than a page and a half on Guru Nanak in a book relating to Sikh Wars, still ventured an opinion that the Guru founded a "sect entirely religious without any political aim or organization".  
Gough, Sir C and Arthur D. Innes, *The Sikhs and the Sikhs Wars*, A.D. Innes & Cov., London 1897, V.18.  
Payne who did not understand Guru Granth and found it unreadable, had no access to Guru's Word nevertheless observed that Guru Nanak did not "profess to be the founder of a new nation, his purpose was ethical not political"  
Payne, CH., *A Short History of the Sikhs*, Thomas, Nelson and Sons, London, 29 and 25.  
Same could be said of others of the above category including General John J.H. Gordon, *The Sikhs*, Blackwood & Sons, London 1904, 24 and of W.L.M. Gregor, *The History of the Sikhs*, Vol, James Madden, London 1846,39,44.
2. Some modern historians of the Sikhs like Reverend W.H. McLeod also fall in this category.
3. Cunningham, Joseph Davey, *A History of The Sikhs*, John Murray, London 1849, 53. This position appears to have been taken hesitantly as it is also observed by him that the Guru had no clear views on "political advancement." *Ibid.*, 48.
4. Indubhushan Banerjee: *Evolution of The Khalsa*, A. Mukherjee & Co. (Private) Ltd., Calcutta (2nd Edn.) May 1963, 19.
5. Cf. Toynbee, Arnold J., *Study of History*, 10 Vols., Oxford University Press, 1935-54, V 187, 665-67, 673, VII 414-415, VIII 466.
6. Cf. Singh, Kapur, *Prasaraprasna*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar 1988, 197-206.  
See review by Daljeet Singh "The Sikhs - "History, Religion and Society by W.H. Mcleod", *The Panjab Past and Present*, Punjabi University, Patiala, April 1989, 250-59 for discussion on position of Sikhism on the issue.  
also cf. Grewal, J.S., "Toynbee's Interpretation of Sikh History", *Punjab History Conference*, Patiala 1969,304-10.
7. Field, Dorothy, *The Religion of The Sikhs*, (1901) (Reprint) Ess Ess Publications, Delhi 1976, 10 and 60.
8. Archer, J.C, *The Sikhs in Relation to Hindus, Moslems, Christians and Ahmadiyas*, Princeton University Press, 1946,60-61.
9. Singh, Ganda, "The Maratha-Sikh Relations", *The Panjab past and Present*, Punjab! University, Patiala, October 1967, 311.
10. *A Short History of The Sikhs*, Orient Longmans Ltd. Bombay, 1950, 14.
11. *An Introduction to Panjabi Literature*, Amritsar 1951, 65-66.
12. "Nanak Bani Vich Phalsafa", *Madh Kalin Punjabi Sahit*, (Pbi), Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala 1970, 64.  
Singh, Lal: "Guru Nanak da Shahkar", *Shabdarath Bani Guru Nanak Dev Ji*, (Pbi), Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala 1970, 31 comment on Babarvani verses is that they represent "a revolutionary call... sharpened on the spiritual sharpener to become a sword's edge".
13. *Gurmat Darshan (Pbi) Shromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar, 1962*

14. Cf. Preface to *Prasharprasna*, Hind Publishers Ltd., Jullunder, 1959, 12.
15. *Use of Guru Nanak Dev*, Lahore Book Shop, Ludhiana, 1958, 231 f.n.
16. Sorath, *Guru Granth*, 599.  
*Aprampar parbrahm parmehar Nanak gur milia soi jio.*  
 also, Ramkali, *Guru Granth*, 878.  
*Gur Parmehar Nanak bhetio sache sabad nibera.*
17. Var Majh, *Guru Granth*, 148.  
*Hau dhadi bekar kare laiya. Rat dihai kai var dhurhu farmaiya. Dhadi sache mahal khasam bulaiya. Sachi sift salah kapra paiya.*
18. *Guru Granth*, 1286.
19. Tilang, *Guru Granth*, 722.  
*Jaisi mai avai khasam ki bani taisra kari gian ve Lalo.*  
 also Wadhans, *ibid.*, 566.  
*Ta mai khaiya kaihan ja tujhai kahaiya.*
20. Gauri, *ibid.*, 222.  
*Adist disai ta kahia jae.*  
*Bin dekhe kaihna birtha jae.*
21. Gauri M.IV, *ibid.*, 308  
*Satgur ki bani sat sat kar janhu gursikhu*  
*har karta apmuhhu kadhae.*  
 Gauri ki Var M.IV, *ibid.*, 306.  
*Ih akhar tin akhia jini jagat sabh upaia.*  
 Sorath M.V *Guru Granth* 628.  
*Dhur ki bani aae tin sagli chint mitai.*
22. Bhattan de Swaiye, *Guru Granth*, 1395.  
*Ap narayan kaladhar jag mahi parvario.*  
*Ibid.*, 1408.  
*Jot rup ap Guru Nanak kahaio.*  
 Varan Bhai Gurdas Ji, (Pbi.), Shromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, February 1952, Var I Pauri 35.  
*Ik baba akal rup.*  
 Mani Singh, Bhai, *Sikhan di Bhagatmala*, (Pbi.).  
 Khalsa Samachar, February 1955, 90.  
*Jis nirmakar da vichar devte brahmadik nahin pai sakde so Guru Nanak ji hain.*
23. Sesagiri Rao, K.L., "Guru Nanak and The Hindu Heritage", *The Journal of Religious Studies*, Punjabi University, Patiala, September 1969, 48.
24. Srirag, *Guru Granth*, 83-84.  
*Kudrat kar ke vassia soi.*  
*Jeh dhir dekha teh dhir mauzood.*
25. Maru, *Guru Granth*, H138.  
*Jam dekha taih din dayala....*  
*Jag tis ki chhaya jis bap na maya.*
26. Ramali, *Guru Granth*, 952.  
*Karni bajhon bhist na pai.*
27. Srirag, *Guru Granth*, 26.  
*Vich dunian sev kamaie ta dargah baisan paie.*

28. *Varan Bhai Gurdas Ji*, op. cit. 20.
29. Sidh Gosht, Ramkali, *Guru Granth*, 938.  
*Jaise jal meh kamal nralamu murgai naisane.*
30. For an almost complete compilation of such terms see Sekhon, Sant Singh, *Madh KaHn punjabi Sahit*, (PbL), Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala 1970, 118-26.
31. Grewal, J.S., *Guru Nanak in History*, Panjab University, Chandigarh 1969, 148-49.
32. Suhi, *Guru Granth*, 729.  
*Ja kau mahal hajur dujaia nivai kis.*
33. Maru, *Guru Granth*, 1028.  
*Asur sangharan ram hamara.*
34. Gauri, *Ibid.*, 224.  
*Daint sanghar sant nistare.*  
Sri Rag, *ibid.*, 59.  
*Sukh data dukh metno satgur asur sanghar.*  
cf. also Gauri, *ibid.*, 224-25.
35. One such passage is found in Rag Wadhans, *ibid.*, 557-58.
36. Malhar, *ibid.*, 1284.  
*Pasu manas chum plete androh kalia*  
Suhi, *ibid.*, 751.  
*Mul na bujhan apna se pasua se dhor jio.*
37. Maru, *ibid.*, 990.  
*Bhaia manur kanchan phir hovai je gur mile tineha.*
38. Parbhati, *ibid.*, 1329.  
*Satgur paai ai pura nava n pasu prethu dev kare.*
39. Srirag ki var, *ibid.*, 91.  
*Jo tis bhavai Nanka kagu hans kare.*
40. Basant, *ibid.*, 1172.  
*Paras bhet bhae se paras Nanak har gur sang thiai.*
41. Gauri, *ibid.*, 223.  
*Bhai rach rahe so nirbhauhoai.*  
*Jaisa seve taiso hoai.*  
Ramkali, *ibid.*, 931.  
*Jin jata so tis hi jeha.* *Ibid.*, 936.  
*Tin hi jaisithe rahan jap jap ridai murar.*  
Sidh Gosht, *ibid.*, 943 (cf. also *Freedkot Wala Teeka*, Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala 1970, p.1940). *Anhat sunn ratte se kaisai Jis le upje tahi hi jaisai*
42. Rag Asa, *Guru Granth*, 417.  
*Ik na wakhat khuha ikna puja jae...*  
*Ram na kabhu chetia hun kahni na milai khudai*
43. Ramkali, *ibid.*, 903.  
*Kal puran Kateb kuran*  
*Pothi pandit rahe pura.*

*Nanak nao bhaia rahman.*

Basant, *ibid.*, 1191.

*Ad purakh kau allah kahiai sekhan aai vari.*

*Deval devtian kar laga aisi kirat chali.*

Dhanasari, *ibid.*, 662.

*Thaanast jag bhrisht heo dubta iv jag.*

*Khatrain ta dharam chhodia malechh bhakhai gahi.*

*Srisht sabh ik varan hoi dharam gat rahi.*

44. Rag Asa, *ibid.*, 360.  
*Eti mar pai kurlane tain ki darad na aaiya*  
cf. also *Guru Granth* 417, 418.
45. Rag Asa, *ibid.*,  
360 *Ratan vigar vigpai kutti muia sar na kaai.*  
*Ibid.*, 417.  
*Aggo de je chetie ta leait mile sajaai.*
46. Japji, *Guru Granth*, 7.  
*Jor na raj mal man sor.*  
Wadhans, *ibid.*, 566.  
*Sarbai samana ap tuhai dhande laiya.*  
*Ik na tujh Id kiai rajai ikna bhikh bhavaiya.*  
Asa, *ibid.*, 472.  
*Ik nihali pai savan ikna upar rahan kharai.*
47. *Ibid.*, 472.  
*Nadr upathi je karai sultana gha karaida.*
48. Japji, *ibid.*, 3  
*Panch parvan. Panch pardhan,*  
*Panchai pavhi dargahai man,*  
*Panchai sohai dar rajan.*
49. Asa, *Guru Granth*, 417-18.  
*Jis no ap khuvai learta khus laai changiai...*  
*Jin ki chiri dargahi phati tinha mama bhai...*  
*Jai tis bhavai dai wadUiai jai bhavai dai sajai.*
50. Var Asa, *Guru Granth*, 467.  
*Lakh surtan sangram ran mahi chhutai pran.*
51. *Guru Granth*, 142  
*Je jivai pat lathi jai*  
*Sabh haram jeta kichh khaai.*
52. Wadhans, *ibid.*, 579-80.  
*Mahli jaai pavhu khasmai bhavhu rang sio ralian manei...*  
*Maran Mansa suria haq hai mam parvano.*
53. Slok Varan te Wadhik, *Guru Granth*, 1412.  
*Jau tau praim khailan lea chau,*  
*Sir dhar tali gali more ao.*
54. Popularly known as Babarvani verses are four in number. Three have been composed in *Rag Asa* by Guru Nanak and one is in *Rag Tilang*. Altogether they add up to ninety-nine lines.  
In greater part of these verses, Guru describes the woes of an unequal contest.

He sees it as potentiality of the evil to triumph and perpetuate itself if inadequately resisted. He ridicules the efforts of those who pretended to provide supernatural support against the offenders, and advises that being adequately prepared to resist is better preparation against such an eventuality. He exhorts the victims not to be overawed by the barbarian hordes, as their success, being in violation of God's Will, is ephemeral. They would soon reap what they had sown if resisted effectively by the God-oriented.

Brutal violation of a people, their culture and religion agitates him much. A third part of the verses is devoted to depicting the sad plight of women which has particularly moved him. He considers it to be the consequences of evil being given a free hand. The victims have not made adequate preparation, have been lured to life of wanton luxury, and material pursuits, lived in ignorance of God's Will, so they must share the responsibility for what is happening to them.

Guru prefers a people capable of protecting the honour of their women-folk and maintaining their religious, political and cultural heritage inviolate.

God is unequivocally accepted as the final arbiter in political power, as in everything else.

55. Rag Asa *Guru Granth*, 470  
*Kal main bed atharban hua nam khudai al/ah bhaiaa....*  
 Var Malar *ibid.*, 1288.  
*Hansan bajan te sikdaran ehna pria nao.*  
*Fadkhi lagi jat fahainagai nahi thao.*  
*Dhanasari ibid.*, 662.  
*Thanst jag bhrisht hoe dupa iv jag.*
56. *Puratan lanamsakhi* Bhai Vir Singh (ed)., Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar 1971,43.  
 See also, Bhalla, Sarup Das, *Guru Nanak Mahima*, (Pbi.) (Reprint) Bhasha Vibhag 1970,34.
57. Rag Suhi, *Guru Granth*, 729.  
*la Kau mahal hajur dujai nivai kis.*

## GURU NANAK IN HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

KHARAK SINGH

*I. Introduction*

1.1 This paper primarily gives a brief outline of the Sikh ideology, as expounded in the *bani* of Guru Nanak, recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib. The object is to explain how this ideology differs from the earlier traditions, and to highlight how Guru Nanak completely rejected the world-view of earlier dichotomous religions, giving instead a new ideology combining the spiritual life with the empirical life of man, based on his own revelation. This radical departure marked the beginning of a new faith. In fact, Guru Nanak's system, his concept of God and His creation, the fundamental principles of his faith, his analysis of the problems of mankind, his views on the purpose of human life and its specific goal alongwith methodology for its attainment, and his over-all world-view, constitute what is admittedly the latest in the succession of major religions of the world. A few studies dealing with some of these aspects, have recently appeared. Towards the end of this paper the validity of interpretations contained therein will be examined.

*II. The Sikh Ideology*

2.1 In explaining the Sikh ideology, as Guru Nanak's ideology is now called, we shall discuss only its major elements like the Guru's concept of God, his views about the reality of the world, the goal of life he fixes for the religious man, the methodology prescribed for following the religious path, and the essentials of the duties and responsibilities of the seeker and god-man, referred to in the *bani* as *gurmukh* or *sachara*.

2.2 *Concept of God:* Some earlier systems like Yoga, Sankhya and Jainism, were dualistic, assuming two kinds of reality, namely, Atman (spiritual) and Prakirti (material). Man was considered a combination of both, and belief in God as a single

creative basic reality was conspicuous by its absence. Sankra's system is strictly monistic, and the world and its activities are considered 'unreal' or *Mithya*. Still other systems were pantheistic, and attached no spiritual value to the moral life. On the other hand, Guru Nanak's religion is uncompromisingly monotheistic. In the very *Mul Mantra* God is described as 'the sole One, the Creator, Self-existent and Immanent, Un-incarnated and Timeless'. God is the Creator of the universe, which is separate from Him and not His emanation. He is Transcendent as well Immanent in His creation. He looks after His creation benevolently and is happy to do so'.<sup>1</sup> He feeds all, 'even those created in water'.<sup>2</sup> His benevolence knows no bounds. He continues to be gracious and never tires of doing so, although those who receive might.<sup>3</sup> He is the 'Ocean of Virtues'.<sup>4</sup> He is all Love, the rest He is ineffable.<sup>5</sup> In truth, Love is His language'.<sup>6</sup> He has a Will, which is altruistic. 'Everybody is under His Will. Nobody is outside its scope'.<sup>7</sup> Only by recognizing and following His Will, can the wall of falsehood, which separates man from Him, be demolished.<sup>8</sup> Implications of belief in such a God are clear for the seeker. The seeker must see His immanence in all fellow beings. He must love the entire humanity as His creation, and express this love through service. This is the way how one can carry out His altruistic Will.

2.3 *Reality of the World*: In Sankra's Vedanta, which has dominated the Indian religious thought for a very long time, the world is *Mithya* or 'unreal'. It does not deserve to be taken seriously, since its existence is an illusion. Buddha looked at the world as a place of suffering. In contrast, Guru Nanak asserted that the world is 'real' as a creation of the Creator, the True One. He says:

True and holy are Thy continents and universes;  
 True and holy are Thy worlds and the forms created by Thee;  
 True and holy are Thy doings and Thy contemplations;  
 True and holy is Thy Decree and Thy Court  
 True and holy is Thy Ordinance, Thy command;  
 True and Holy is thy Grace and the mark thereof.  
 Holy Lord, millions upon millions supplications to Thee I utter.  
 By the might and strength of the holy Lord subsist all.  
 Holy is Thy laudation, holy Thy praise.  
 Holy King, true and holy is Thy creative might,<sup>9</sup>  
 Holy Himself, holy all existence-  
 Of this the Master by the holy Word realization has granted.,<sup>10</sup>  
 Guru Nanak does not regard the world as a place of misery.

He says:

He created night and day, seasons and occasions;  
 So also Air, water, Fire and the Nether regions:  
 Amidst these has He fixed the earth,  
 the place for Righteous Action:<sup>11</sup>  
 This world is the chamber of the Holy Lord;  
 It is His abode.,<sup>12</sup>

Else where the world has been referred to as '*bhum rangavali*,<sup>13</sup> (colourful earth), and '*phullan ki baghaat*' (garden of flowers). God has been praised for His innumerable gifts available in this world. In contrast to the earlier belief that human birth was a punishment for past actions, Guru Nanak looked upon it as a rare opportunity to meet the Lord. Constantly he reminds us to avail ourselves of this opportunity, so that the 'jewel' of human life is not wasted. The emphasis is on taking the world seriously, since it is real.

2.4 *Goal of Life*: In Sankhya, as also in Yoga and Jainism, where no God is assumed, the goal is isolation of the spiritual monad from the material element. In Sankra's Vedanta the goal is realisation of the self, recognizing the unreality of world. In Buddhism the goal is 'Nirvan' or liberation from the cycle of transmigration or the cycle of birth, life and death. All these goals and even merger with the ultimate spiritual Reality, are strictly individual and to a degree personal or selfish. These demand withdrawal from life and imply a complete lack of concern for the society. These goals were, therefore, not acceptable to Guru Nanak. In Guru Nanak's *bani* the ideal man has been referred to as *gurmukh* or *sachiara*. In *Japu Ji* the Guru asks: 'How to become a *sachiara*? And how to break the wall of falsehood that separates a man from the Lord?',<sup>14</sup> He himself answers: 'By moving according to His Will and Ordinance: The *gurmukh* recognizes the altruistic Will of God, and is completely attuned to it. God is all Love, and so is the *gurmukh*. This love is expressed in the form of altruistic deeds or service of mankind. The *gurmukh* is characterised by his unbounded enthusiasm for service and sacrifice for others<sup>15</sup>. He is conscious of the immanence of God in all beings. He has no trace of selfishness. The Guru's deep concern for the entire humanity, was voiced by the Fourth Guru when he said: 'O Lord, the world is in flames. Save it by whatever means you may be pleased to do it: '<sup>16</sup> His concern is so genuine, that any claim for exclusive prophethood does not even cross his mind. Following his Guru, the motto of the *gurmukh* is '*aap mukt, mukt kare sansar*'<sup>17</sup> (Salvation of the entire humanity along with his



own, is his goal) 2.5 *The Path*: The methodology or the discipline and practices, prescribed in Guru Nanak's system for the achievement of the goal, are completely different from those of earlier faiths. Practically all the previous religious systems laid stress on withdrawal from life, and asceticism was considered essential for spiritual progress. Since world was considered *mithya* or unreal and a place of suffering, withdrawal was the only course for liberation. Dichotomy between the spiritual and empirical life was complete. The Naths or Yogis took three oaths at the time of initiation, namely, living on alms (following no occupation), celibacy, and Ahimsa. In Buddhism life as a Bhikshu (one who lives on bhiksha or alms), enjoyed high merit. The same was the case with monks in Jainism. The Sanyas or Varanashram dharma among the Hindus was also a compromise between the ascetic and the empirical requirements of life. Guru Nanak rejected the notion that worldly activities were a hindrance to spiritual progress. His thesis was that the two are not only compatible, but they are complementary and essential to each other. This was a complete break from the old tradition developed over more than two thousand years. Since Guru Nanak's ideal man, *Gunnukh*, is attuned to the Will of God, recognition and carrying out His altruistic Will must constitute the substance of the discipline required to achieve that state or the *Gunnukh pad*. His Will manifests itself in looking after His creation. So Guru Nanak prescribed the path of a householder for his disciples, involving marriage, children, looking after a family, and work to earn a living. He decried the parasitic life of Yogis and other ascetics, who live on begging. The Guru says:

"The egoist in a fit of passion deserting home is ruined. And then at others' home casts covetous glances. His householder's duty he neglects; Devoid of contact with the holy Preceptor, in a whirlpool of false thinking is he fallen' .<sup>18</sup>

He asks the Yogi, "Are you not ashamed of begging from door to door?" Again he says about the ascetic: "He sets out to instruct the world; his mind is blind, and begging from door to door he loses his honour.,<sup>19</sup> . Guru Amardas later explained it thus: 'If I become a Yogi and wandering in the world, beg from door to door how shall I settle so many accounts, when called upon to do so ?,<sup>20</sup> Rejecting mendicancy Guru Nanak prescribes his own solution in the following hymn:

"One, incapable of earning a living, gets ears slit like *yogis*:

Practises mendicancy giving up caste identity,  
 Claiming to be a religious teacher, and goes out to beg,  
 Touch not his feet.  
 Those that eat the bread of their labour  
 and share their earnings with others  
 Saith Nanak, they truly recognize the way.”<sup>21</sup>

This is indeed a revolutionary idea, and the Yogis’ objection to it is represented in the famous question asked by them: ‘O Nanak, why have you *added Kanji* (of worldly life) to the (sacred) milk (of spirituality)?”<sup>22</sup> *Kanji* is an acidic ferment of black carrots, which spoils milk, rendering it unfit for consumption. The Guru explained to them how they had missed the very elements of spirituality from their very initiation. The Guru also took them to task for their escapism and for neglecting their duties towards their fellowmen.

2.6 The Guru also defined what kind of house-holder his disciples should be :

‘The true householder must his faculties restrain:  
 should beg of God to grant him prayer,  
 austerities and self-discipline:  
 Should induce himself to good chairtable deeds-  
 Such householder is pure as Ganga water.,,<sup>23</sup>

He warned against acquisitiveness, accumulation of wealth and self-indulgence or what is called consumerism, pointing out that ‘wealth without evil-doing comes not, but in death it accompanies him not’. The emphasis is on charity or sharing the earnings from hard and honest work, with the needy. Saith Nanak: ‘In the hereafter is received reward for what man from his own earnings offers’.

2.7 Sikhism is often referred to as a structure based on three pillars, namely, *Naam Japna* (Remembering God or dedication to Him), *dharam di kirt karna* (work through righteous means), and *vand chhakna* (Sharing one’s earnings with others). It is only a householder’s life that offers all the three opportunities together. He earns for his own living and shares it with his own family and others in whom he sees the immanence of God, constantly reminding him of God. These three duties or responsibilities are conjoint and cannot be segregated.

2.8 The place of honour given to a householder’s life, is a rejection of celibacy which was considered essential for spiritual pursuits in almost all other Indian religious traditions. In the Guru’s system this is an unnatural restriction, and is, in fact, based

on a hatred of women. This had led to the inferior status being accorded to women by practically all religious leaders before Guru Nanak.

2.9 Guru did not preach the householder's way of life merely through words. He actually lived it to set an example for his followers. He established a colony at Kartarpur, and settled as a peasant, working with his own hands, and involving other members of the community. The produce was shared by all including those who came from outside. He ran a common kitchen which was open to all.

2.10 *Emphasis on Deeds and Truthful Living*: This is one of the most important features of Guru Nanak's religion. Truth and its knowledge are stressed in most faiths. In fact, knowledge of Truth or Gian is the goal of some religions, the highest thing attainable. Guru Nanak, however, is not satisfied with knowledge of truth alone. 'Truth is higher than everything. Higher still is true living,'<sup>24</sup> Truth has to be practised in the form of good deeds. 'Good and bad deeds are not things merely to be discussed. Each action is recorded for later life'.<sup>25</sup> Approval or rejection by God is determined on the basis of one's actions. This is understood easily, when one considers the fact that Guru Nanak's religion was based upon his mystic experience with the Ultimate Reality as Love. Love cannot be exercised or expressed in a vacuum. It can be practised in a becoming world and can be expressed only in virtuous actions or deeds. 'By service in this world, shall ye get a place at the Divine Portal.'<sup>26</sup>

2.11 *Naam*: There are repeated references to Naam in the hymns of Guru Nanak. But it does not mean merely a mechanical repetition or muttering of a word or a name. It denotes a realization of the immanence of God, and expresses itself in devotion to or service of His creation or one's fellow beings. It does not mean idle *samadhi* or prolonged one-point meditation, which the Guru declares as futile. This is not to say that uttering of the Lord's name is of no use. However, it has value only if it is an expression of one's love for Him, and leads to altruistic deeds, in accordance with His altruistic Will. Altruistic work is His worship.

2.11 *Equality of Human Beings*: Guru Nanak's concept of human equality can rarely be surpassed. 'I consider all men high and I acknowledge none as low. One God has fashioned all the vessels, one light pervades the whole creation. One findeth this truth by His grace, no one can efface His gift.'<sup>27</sup> Guru Nanak

rejected thousands-of-year-old caste system sanctioned by the Vedas and other religious scriptures. 'Vain chatter is the boast of caste, vain chatter is the boast of fame. All living beings are under the protection of One. If one maketh himself known a good man, it will be true only, Nanak, when, his faith is approved by the Lord.,<sup>28</sup> 'Caste can gain nothing. Truth within will be tested.,<sup>29</sup> 'Appreciate the Light, do not ask the caste, there is no caste hereafter'.<sup>30</sup> Caste and power are of no avail hereafter. On their account nobody is honoured, or dishonoured for want of them. Those alone will be deemed good, whose faith receives His approval<sup>31</sup>. Guru took Bhai Mardana, a low caste Muslim as his companion in his famous Udisis or world travels, to set a practical example. He laid the foundation of a casteless society by organising a *Sangat* (society or congregation) and *langar* (refectory) or *pangat* open to all castes. Such sangats he organised wherever he went. He rarely lost an opportunity to denounce any discrimination based on caste or creed. During his visit to Eminabad, the Guru accepted the hospitality of a low-caste artisan in preference to a high-caste Chief. He declared: 'There are lowly among the low castes, and the lowest among the lowly: Nanak stands by their side, and envies not the high-castes. Lord, Thy grace falls where the lowly are cherished.' <sup>32</sup>

2.12 "*Status of Women*: The concept of equality of man and woman touched unprecedented heights with Guru Nanak. It is extremely doubtful, if womankind can find a greater advocate of their equality with man. Woman had a very inferior status in most Indian faiths. She was looked upon as a 'temptress', 'poisonous like a snake (nagini)', 'gateway to hell', and was treated almost like a Sudra during certain periods of her normal life. Tulsi Das the great religious philosopher and author of Ramayana, wrote in his wisdom, 'Cattle, fools, *Sudras* and woman are ever entitled to rebuke.' Woman was considered fit only to be burned alive with her husband when he died. In Digambra Jainism a woman has to take another birth as man in order to be a candidate for salvation. Even in other major faiths of the times, treatment meted out to women left much to be desired. A more powerful case could hardly be claimed for women than the one Guru

Nanak did in Asa di var, over five hundred years ago:

"From woman is man born, inside her is he conceived;

To woman is man engaged, and woman he marries.

With woman is man's companionship.

From woman originate new generations.  
 Should woman die, another is sought;  
 By woman's help is man kept in restraint.  
 Why revile her of whom are born Kings (or great ones of the earth)?

From woman is born woman, no human being without woman is born.

Saith Nanak : The holy Eternal alone with woman can dispense.'<sup>33</sup>  
 In Guru Nanak's system woman enjoys perfect equality with man. When missionary work was organised, women were placed in charge of some districts.

2.14 *Socio-Political Responsibilities*: Active participation in social and political activities is a direct corollary of the Guru's religion of Love expressed through deeds, while carrying out His Will. His was a crusade against all evils, religious, spiritual, social, political. His teachings covered every dimension of human life. His scathing criticism included in its scope not only religious prejudices, hypocrisy and bigotry of religious leaders (*Mullahs and Pandits*), social discrimination of the upper classes, but extended to corruption of the administration, oppression of the rulers and tyranny of the invaders. He condemned the invaders as a horde of sin. He took the rulers to task for their unpreparedness and fall in virtue which brought indescribable suffering to the people. He exhorted the people to action, pointing out the futility of prayer alone and the worship of their deities.

"Hindu temples and Muslim sacred spots went up in flames,  
 And, princes cut to pieces with dust were mingled.  
 No Moghul with such spells was struck blind;  
 None by their spells was affected.'<sup>34</sup>

A parallel to such intense reaction is hard to find in contemporary history of India. He even complained to God thus:

"As in the agony of suffering the people wailed,  
 Didst Thou feel no compassion for them?  
 Listen, Thou, who art Creator of all.  
 Should a powerful foe molest one equally powerful,  
 Little would the mind be grieved,  
 But when a ferocious tiger falls upon a herd of kine,  
 Then the Master must be called to account".<sup>35</sup>

The Guru's message of socio-political responsibility is clear. His Sikh has thus to accept full social and political responsibility, and is enjoined upon to resist oppression and to protect the weak and down-trodden. That is the only way to express and test his love for the Lord and His creation.

2.14 The above teachings should leave no doubt that Guru Nanak's methodology for attaining the status of *gurmukh* or *suchiara*, is based upon love of God and His creation expressed through virtuous actions. There is no place for dichotomy between the spiritual and the empirical life of man. Life has to develop as a whole. The concept of spiritual progress without attention to empirical aspects is untenable and is, therefore, rejected, as lopsided and escapist. His followers have to resist aggression and injustice, from whatever quarters it should come. Guru Nanak's path is for the fullest development of the individual as well as the society. There is no separation of religion from politics. The doctrine of Miri-Piri, formally symbolised by Guru Har Gobind at the time of his succession was in fact laid down by Guru Nanak, being the base of his religion.

### *III. Misinterpretations*

3.1 Misinterpretation of the Sikh ideology is an old game. Since this ideology, in its essential details, was diametrically opposed to earlier religious beliefs, opposition started from the very times of Guru Nanak, and has continued upto the present day. Frequently the criticism is due to a lack of understanding. Quite often, however, it is the result of religious prejudices and arrogance of the critics. As explained earlier asceticism or withdrawal from life, was the hallmark of practically all Indian religious traditions. Guru Nanak rejected this in favour of a householder's life, with emphasis on good deeds, social responsibility and a moral life. Naths who were champions of the earlier system, were probably the first to criticise the sanctity accorded by Guru Nanak to the householder's way. For our present discussion, however, we shall first take the contrasting views of two western Scholars who about a century back tried to give their own understanding of the Sikh religion. After that we shall examine in some detail another view expressed, more recently.

3.2 Macauliffe published the findings of his classic study in six volumes of 'The Sikh Religion' in 1910. He summed up the moral and political merit of the Sikh religion thus:

"It prohibits idolatry, hypocrisy, caste-exclusiveness, the concremation of widows, the immurement of women, the use of wine and other intoxicants, tobacco smoking, infanticide, slander, pilgrimage to sacred rivers and tanks of Hindus; and it inculcates loyalty, gratitude for all favours received, philanthropy, justice, impartiality, truth, honesty and all the

moral and domestic virtues known to the holiest citizens of any country.’<sup>36</sup>

On the originality of the Sikh religion Macauliffe’s conclusion was:

“The illustrious author of the *vie de Jesus* asks whether great originality will again arise, or the world would be content to follow the paths opened by the daring creators of the ancient ages. Now there is here presented a religion totally unaffected by Semitic or Christian influences. Based on unity of God, it rejected Hindu formalities and adopted an independent ethical system, rituals and standards which were totally opposed to the theological beliefs of Guru Nanak’s age and country. As we shall see hereafter, it would be difficult to point to a religion of greater originality or to a more comprehensive ethical system.”<sup>37</sup>

3.3 The second study we want to mention is the one conducted by Trumpp (a German), a couple of decades earlier than Macauliffe, who failed to see such merit or originality as pointed out by the latter. His views, quoted below, were far from complimentary:

“The Sikh Granth is a very big volume which I find incoherent and shallow in the extreme, and couched at the same time, in dark and perplexing language in order to cover these defects. It is for us occidentalists, a most painful and stupefying task to read even a single *raga*”.<sup>38</sup>

This damaging view has been quoted to illustrate how personal prejudices and wrong methodology and lack of understanding, can lead to disastrous results.

3.4 It is now proposed to analyse the findings of a recent publication that seeks to reconstruct Sikh History from Sikh literature.<sup>39</sup> Evidently it will not be possible to deal with every part of this publication. The comments in the following paragraphs will be confined to the views expressed in the book on the ideology of Guru Nanak. It is necessary to do so, as the interpretation presented is likely to mislead an unwary reader, and the book constitutes the latest attempt in the series brought out with the same superficial understanding as that of Trumpp. The author has obviously not followed any standard methodology for the study and presentation of Guru Nanak’s ideology, and his interpretations

show a clear materialistic or Marxian influence. This partly accounts for most of his erroneous conclusions.

3.5 The chapter on 'The Bani of Guru Nanak' begins with the statement:

"In Guru Nanak's view of universe, the unreality of the world is contrasted with the 'reality of God: Once the significance of this idea is grasped it is possible to see that he looks upon the contemporary world as disintegrated and delegitimized. With this awareness begins a new 'religious construction of society' which results in the emergence of the Sikh Panth".<sup>40</sup> This is the basic assumption on which the entire structure of his thesis is raised. He has not quoted any part of Guru Nanak's *bani* to support it. In the earlier section we have quoted numerous hymns of the Guru stressing the reality of the universe, which need not be repeated. But the author has carefully suppressed all those quotations. Even in that he has not been that careful, since one quotation from Guru Nanak, which demolishes his assumption, has unwittingly appeared in his selections, viz., "*Ja tu sacha sabh Ko sacha, Kura Koe na Koi.*",<sup>41</sup> Author's own translation is, "No being is untrue, since God is True." In fact Guru Nanak's statement is more positive: 'Since thou art True, all are true; None are untrue.' Evidently the 'unreality' of the world attributed to the Guru, is a hat trick of the author's imagination. The book starts with a baseless assumption, and thus reveals its purpose and level. The hymns quoted by him in the text refer to evanescence or the becoming nature of life and the worldly possessions. There is not even the remotest hint as to the unreality of the world. In fact, the Guru refers to this world as '*dharamsal*, installed in the midst of air water, fire and nether regions, as a place for righteous actions.,<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere in the Guru Granth it is described as the 'Lord's chamber in which He dwells.<sup>43</sup> He is True; so is His creation:<sup>44</sup> For Guru Nanak life is not merely real, it is very meaningful. It is a rare opportunity for meeting the Lord<sup>45</sup> through love which manifests itself in the service of His creation or man's fellow beings. Love cannot be exercised in a vacuum. The object of love has to be real.

3.6 The author seems to have taken his views from some earlier faiths like Vaishnavism, Vedanta, Nathism, etc., which do not consider the world as real or worthwhile and are otherworldly. May be, he is following Max Weber who finds all Indian religions to be life-negating. Max Weber's failing was that he never examined Sikhism in coming to his conclusion. As Mark



Juergensmeyer has stated, 'had Weber examined Sikhism, he could not have made his sweeping observation about all Indian religions being life-negating'.<sup>46</sup>

3.7 Quoting Guru Nanak the author points out: "Kings, subjects, shiqdars would not remain for ever. Shops, bazaars and cities would be in ruins in accordance with God's Hukm." The verses simply bring out the evanescence of human life and worldly possessions, and indicate their time dimension. His contention of 'unreality' of the world and suggested negativism are clearly rejected in the *bani* of Guru Nanak. To every student of the Guru Granth and the lives of the Gurus it would appear a clear distortion.

3.8 At another place the author puts forward an illusory distinction, by resort to jugglery of words, when he says that for the Sikhs the objective world was not unreal but non-real. This is a distinction without a difference, the reality of which has no basis. Obviously he is trying to imitate Sankra who referred to *maya* as *mithya*, which was neither saty (real) nor astay (unreal), but *saty-astay*. There is, however, no such confusion in the Guru's *bani*. In verse after verse he has stressed the reality of the world, and has repeatedly exhorted his followers to take it seriously and avail of the rare opportunity for fulfillment of their spiritual destiny. On page 5 the author says: "Guru Nanak refers to palpable reality of Kaliyuga". Does it not contradict his own theory of unreality of the world attributed to Guru Nanak? It seems beyond the realm of reason or sense that the Guru who rejected, the centuries old doctrines of asceticism, monasticism, celibacy and ahimsa, and accepted instead a house-holder's life believed in the non-reality of the world.

3.9 The author has borrowed another assumption from Tawney, quoting him as follows: '

"The state is something more than an institution, created by material necessities or political convenience. It is the temporal expression of spiritual obligations. It is a link between individual souls and the supernatural society of which all are held to be members. It rests not merely on practical convenience, but on the will of God".

Obviously, the author assumes that the above view is universally accepted, and is shared by Guru Nanak. Both these assumptions are incorrect. Among the Western religions, in Judaism even kings like David and Solomon were severely criticized by their prophets. Christianity, an offshoot of Judaism, also never

accepted this view, and in fact their sufferings in the earlier centuries were due to this. The only notable exceptions were the ancient Egyptian and Roman cultures which accepted their emperors as representatives of God on earth. On the other hand, Guru Nanak has made it abundantly clear in his hymns that he conceded no such divine rights to kings or rulers. His criticism of the kings and the ruling class as well as the religious leaders who colluded with them in the exploitation of the poor subjects, is scathing in the extreme, and is unparalleled in its intensity. He describes the kings as (man-eating) tigers: officials as hounds' or 'eagles' trained to bring their Own folks to gallows<sup>47</sup>, The author has himself presented a fairly representative selection of the Guru's

hymns attacking the rampant corruption in the political, administrative and religious spheres and the atrocities committed on the helpless people.

The intensity of Guru's feelings can be

judged from the fact that he did not hesitate even to complain to God saying, 'O Lord, did you not feel any pain, when such intense suffering was inflicted, and there was so much wailing?'<sup>48</sup>

In order to give practical shape to his idea of resistance against political oppression Guru Nanak took three tangible steps. He organised his society, removed the hurdle of *ahimsa*, and created the system of succession, to enable his Panth to undo the oppression. No other religious leader had done such a thing before in India. However, the author is in no mood to give any credit to Guru Nanak. He concludes with impunity: "Guru Nanak's intense reaction to the politico-administrative set-up is more symbolic than realistic." In the context explained above the author's conclusion is clearly self contradictory, untenable and illogical.

3.10 The author has mentioned Weber's idea of 'active asceticism' only to create confusion in the interpretation of Guru Nanak's *bani*. The idea itself is a contradiction in terms. When applied to the system of Guru Nanak, it is manifestly in- appropriate. For, in India guru Nanak is the first spiritual leader who rejected asceticism, monasticism, celibacy, sanyas, etc., and instead, recommended a householder's life. What is even more important, in dealing with political misrule and tyranny, he unhesitatingly rejected *ahimsa*, which, as also in pacifist Christianity, from where the author has borrowed the ill-assorted Weberian phrase, had been virtually a permanent bar against a religious man fighting against oppression of the weak. Guru Nanak never imposed any harsh and unnatural ascetic or monastic

discipline. His message, as further explained by the Fifth Guru later, was "Liberation can be attained in a life of smiling playfulness, and enjoyment of wear and food,"<sup>49</sup>. Guru Nanak has repeatedly referred to the futility of *yogic* practices and one point meditation. The so-called 'interiority' which Mcleod is so keen to thrust on Guru Nanak's religious system, comes under the same

category, and is of little value without carrying out the altruistic Will of God and service of mankind through noble deeds and a moral life. No religious leader has emphasized moral deeds, the sap that sustains social structure, more than Guru Nanak who says that man's assessment is on the basis of his deeds, and that one is near or away from God by one's deeds alone.<sup>50</sup>

3.11 Bellah has been quoted as follows "Four-class system appears to be the characteristic of all the great historic civilisations: a political-military elite, a cultural-religious elite, a rural lower-status group (peasantry), and an urban lower-status group (merchants and artisans)" Here again neither the generalisation of Bellah is correct, nor is its reference concerning Guru Nanak's *bani* relevant. The Brahminical four-class system, as is well known, is singular in its fabrication and religio-spiritual sanction. Bellah seems to be unaware of the scriptural sanction of the Varanashram dharma, which governs the entire gamut of Hindu society. One cannot be a Hindu without belonging to a caste, for, in that case his spirituo-moral role and future will remain undetermined. While the four-class structure in other societies or cultures could be changed, such a caste reform is impossible internally in Hinduism. It is for this reason that Guru Nanak criticised the Vedas for giving sanction to it, and at the very start of his mission, gave a blow to it, by taking Mardana, a low-caste Muslim, as his life companion. For the same reasons the later Gurus created separate institutions and centres of the Sikh faith, besides a new Scripture, wholly governing the Sikh way of life.

3.12 The author concedes that Guru Nanak succeeded in reconstructing the society. But while talking of symbols to express a new faith, he quotes Durkhem to suggest a virtual impossibility of the task, saying: "Whether those will resemble those of the past or not, and whether or not they will be more adequate to express the reality which they seek to translate, that is, something that Surpasses the faculty of human sight ."

It has already been stated how emphatic was Guru Nanak on bringing religion into the empirical life of man, and making his religion wholly life-affirming and responsible in respect of every aspect of social life. His diagnosis is that without the cementing force of altruism it is impossible to maintain socio-political cohesion, and that the various institutions of life whether political or social structures would inevitably become corrupt and dis-integrate. On Guru Nanak's success in establishing a new society with new values, one may ask the learned author, whether it was due to the pacificism attributed by the author to the Guru's system, or an active interest in the spirituo-social welfare of humanity.

3.13 On page 13, the author writes:

"An analysis of the theological imagery of Guru Nanak, indicates that he addressed himself largely to petty traders, artisans and to bond-servants of the moneyed magnates."

The inference is based on a very distorted spectrum, and is patently illogical. Guru Nanak was one of the greatest travellers in world history. During his sojourns his encounters with all sections of society in countless regions are recorded. He had occasions to meet all strata of people from the lowest to the highest, and in his *bani* there are plenty of references to all groups and professions. Tradition in India lists professions under four categories, viz farming, trading, service and begging. All find detailed coverage in the Guru's hymns, besides the leaders and priest of different religious faiths and the administrative or ruling hierarchy.

3.14 on page 19 it is stated:

"Almost a complete transvaluation of values is achieved. 'The blind man is called a leader, the sleeper, awake: the awakened, a sleeper; the quick, the dead; the dead, the quick; the newly arrived, the goner; the goner, newly arrived; stranger's property, their own; their own, not likeable; the sweet, bitter; the bitter, sweet. They worship the maid *maya*, not the master God. Thus they speak ill of God intoxicated men."

There is no clear indication in the above by the author as to who is being quoted, and what message is intended to be conveyed.

3.15 The author concludes his chapter by quoting Bellah

thus:

"Religion provided the ideology and social cohesion for rebellions and reforms. on the other hand, religion performed the functions of legitimation and reinforcement of the

existing social order, specially under the Sikh rule. The conclusion is rather extraordinary, since it suggests that, on the one hand, the Guru's *bani* led to revolution and reform, and on the other, it served to legitimize the Sikh rule. The self-contradictory nature of this conclusion is matched only by the arbitrariness of the initial assumption of the unreality of the world attributed to Guru Nanak with which mis-conception or prejudice the author starts the first chapter of his book. We have already stated the three major steps the Guru took to organise the society, that ultimately not only demolished the three-thousand year old caste differences, but also overthrew the oppressive political system. To call Guru Nanak a *status-quoist* giving sanction to an unjust existing social or political order, appears to be a sheer exhibition of bias or perversion.

3.16 The author has quoted selectively from the *bani* of Guru Nanak. In a number of cases, however, the translation has not been very accurate. A few examples are given to illustrate how his inaccuracies whether deliberate or negligent have been used to make major misinterpretations.

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Author's translation</u>	<u>Translation by Talib</u> <sup>51</sup>
tis seon nehon na kijae jo disai <i>chalanhar</i> (page 2)	The world is <i>unreal</i> and unworthy of human attachment.	Attach not yourself to what is <i>evanescent</i> .
sagal jot rup tern dekhiya sagal bhavan teri <i>maya</i> (page 3)	Social distinction are metaphysically invalid, because of two principles. They are distinctions in the realm of <i>unreality</i> or <i>Maya</i> , and they are false, because the light of God shines in everybody everywhere.	In all universe is manifest thy <i>might</i> . In all manifestation is seen thy form.
Jat aja t ajoni Sambhao na tis <i>bhao</i> na bharmo (page 4)	<i>Without</i> any caste, <i>love</i> or illusion.	Not characterised by high or low caste -- Unincarnated, self-existent; <i>from fear</i> and doubt <i>free</i> .
app sujan no bhulai sacha vad kirsan (Page 17)	God never forgets that 'Truth is a peasant.'	The Lord, holy Master-Cultivator is not neglectful.

gori seti tute bhatar putingandh pave sansar	Woman is satisfied with her husband, sons continue their family succession	Should the husband with the wife have break of relations, through progeny are their bonds forged again.
---	---	--

3.17. We have shown how in every aspect Guru Nanak's system and his activities are life-affirming, aiming clearly at revolutionary changes in religious ideology, social structure and political approach and objectives. The author's observations regarding his *bani* and activities are exactly contrary to what Guru Nanak stated, preached, practised and aimed at. In the Guru's model, the centre of religious practice is the householder who lives in a becoming world, as real as the Lord who created it, and who is immanent in it; who earns his living through honest means and shares it with others in need; who is ever engaged in carrying out the Will of God through altruistic deeds; and who accepts social responsibility as an active member of a society committed to a just political order or Kingdom of God on earth. The author wants us to believe on the authority of Guru Nanak, that the world is unreal and unworthy of attachment, interest or activities, social or political. To support his indefensible thesis the author has made ample use of the art of suppression, misinterpretation and even mistranslation. And yet he could not avoid glaring contradictions between the verses quoted and the conclusions drawn. Some times Marxist writers are able partly to hide their bias under verbose jargon but the author's obsession with his faith is so nauseating that he has not stopped short of violating norms of academic expression.

## REFERENCES

1. Adi Granth, page 7, Japu.
2. Ibid, P 955, Var Ramkali mahala 3.
3. Ibid, P 2, Japu.
4. Ibid, P 9, Rahras, Asa M.1.
5. Ibid, P 459, Asa M. 5.
6. Ibid, P 2, Japu.
7. Ibid, P 1, Japu.
8. Ibid, P 1, Japu
9. Ibid, P 463, Var Asa M. 1.

10. Ibid, P 1012, Maru,M.1.
11. Ibid, P 7, Japu.
12. Ibid, P 463 Farid.Var Asa M.I.
13. Ibid, P 66, Farid.
14. Ibid, P 1, Japu.
15. Ibid, P 273, Sukhmani, M.5.
16. Ibid, P 853, Var Bilawal, M.4.
17. Ibid, p295 Gauri M.5.
18. Ibid, P 1012, Maru Ashtpadi 7, M.I
19. Ibid, P 903, Ramkali, M.I.
20. Ibid, P 1089, Var Maru,M.3.
21. Ibid, P 2245, Sarang.
22. Bhai Gurdas, Var 1.40.
23. Adi Granth, p 952, Var Ramkali, M.3
24. Ibid, P 62,Sri Rag M.1.
25. Ibid, P 4, Japu.
26. Ibid, P 26. Sri Rag, M.I.
- 27.Ibid, P 62, Sri Rag,Asa 6.14
28. Ibid, P 83, Var Sri Rag, Sloka 1, Pauri 3.
29. Ibid, P 142, Var Maj, P. 10.
30. Ibid, Asa 1.3; p-349
31. Ibid, P 469,Var Asa, S.3, P. 11.
32. Ibid, P 15, Sri Rag.
33. Ibid, P 473, Var Asa.
34. Ibid, p418, Rag Asa.
35. Ibid, P 360, Rag Asa.
36. Macauliffe, MA: "The Sikh Religion", Vol. I. Preface page xxiii,1910, S.Chand & Co., New Delhi.
37. Ibid, chapter ii, Page 1 iv.
38. Trurnpp, E.: "The Adi Granth", Preface page vii,Second Edition, 1970, Munshi Ram Manohar Lal New Delhi.
39. Hans, S.: "A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature", Chapter 1, The Bani of Guru nanak, pp 1-41. ABS Publications, Jalandhar, 1988.
40. Ibid, Page 1.
41. Adi Granth,page 145,Var Majh, Slokas 1,2 Pauri 1.
42. Ibid, Page 7, Japu.
43. Ibid, page 463, Var Asa, M.I.
44. Ibid, Page 294, Gauri M.5.
45. Ibid, page 12, Rahras, Asa M.I.

46. Juergensmeyer, M.: *JourSikh Studies*, GND Univ. Amritsar, 1980-81.
47. *Adi Granth*, page 1288, Var *Malhar* 1.
48. *Ibid*, page 360, *Asa* 1.
49. *Ibid*, page 522, Var *Gujri*, M.5.
50. *Ibid*, page 8, *Japu*.
51. Talib, G.S. : “*Shri Curu Cranth Sahib in English Translation*”; Punjabi Univ. Patiala, 1988.



## 8

KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE AND PLACE OF REASON IN SRI  
GURU GRANTH SAHIB

GURNAM KAUR

In this paper, “Kinds of Knowledge and Place of Reason in Sri Guru Granth Sahib”, we shall see what is the view of knowledge and its kinds according to *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. We shall also refer to the place of reason in this context. First of all the general notion of knowledge will be analysed. It appears that the Sikh Gurus have outlined a triadic concept of hearing (*suniai*), reflection (*marme*), and contemplation (*ek dhyan*) to represent the various kinds of knowledge. These concepts are comparable to somewhat similar view in the *upanishads*.

In their general discourse about the kinds of knowledge, the Sikh Gurus have made an interesting use of the idea of divine reason (*hukam*). Often it is used in a sense in which the notion of the uniformity of Nature is cited as formal ground of induction. Along with the idea of the Word (*shabad*) as testimony, the concept of truth (*sach*) has also been discussed. So the paper has been divided into two parts. In the first part the general notion of knowledge and the concepts of hearing, reflection and contemplation will be analysed and in the second part we shall discuss the idea of divine reason (*hukam*), the Word (*shabad*) as testimony, and the concept of truth (*sach*).

*Knowledge (gian)* : In *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the word *gian* has been used for the word knowledge in English language. It is the Punjabi version of the Sanskrit word *Jnana* which is a noun. The root of the word *Jnana* is *vid* originally identical with *vidanta*. The meaning of the word *vid* is to find, discover, obtain, acquire. The word *Jnana* means knowing, becoming acquainted with, knowledge, especially the higher knowledge derived from meditation on the universal spirit.<sup>1</sup> It is the level of consciousness, a state of knowing. According to a dictionary of philosophy,

knowledge means “relations known and apprehended truth”<sup>2</sup> To know means to be conscious of something. Knowledge means consciousness.

According to *Advaita Vedanta*, “Knowledge is manifest (*svatah prakasa*). It requires no other knowledge to know it. Knowledge neither apprehends itself, nor is apprehended by another knowledge. Like sunlight it shines of itself and does not require any other light for its manifestation while it makes known other things”.<sup>3</sup>

The very first reference made to knowledge is in *Japuji* where it has been used in the sense of perceptual as well as rational knowledge. It is held that the number of devotees is countless. It is perceptual knowledge. It is further held that the reflection on the qualities of the higher Reality leads to knowledge. It is rational knowledge. This rational knowledge leads man on the path of devotion to the higher Reality.<sup>4</sup> It is further mentioned in *Japuji* that to apprehend the higher Truth, perceptual knowledge is most important, being the first step towards knowing. It has been termed as the region of knowledge (*gian khand*).<sup>5</sup> In this region knowing is concerned with the three aspects of perceptual knowledge. The first aspect is related with the perceptual and empirical knowledge of the physical world i.e. the seeker acquires the knowledge of many kinds of winds, waters, fires and heat. The second aspect of perceptual knowledge described in this stanza is the knowledge of society and the principles of social relations, of the many religious practices of the people, of their myths and symbols. The third aspect is concerned with the cultural traditions of the people, the literary and historical aspect of man, and their efforts and achievements in the field of learning and wisdom. Thus, the field of perceptual knowledge is very wide. It expands the consciousness of the seeker in vast directions. it is the first and necessary step for a seeker to cover all the fields of knowledge.

Sri Guru Nanak Dev does not reject the empirical knowledge totally as some rationalists might have done, nor does he consider the empirical knowledge as the only valid knowledge as some empiricists have stressed. He considers perceptual knowledge as the first, and often complementary step towards rational knowledge. Every kind of knowledge has got its own area of performance.

Both should be combined in such a way that they supplement each other to achieve the still higher knowledge which is called

intuitive. The data which we get through sense-perception would be irrelevant and disjointed unless it is unified and integrated by the relations known through reflection and reason.

The third kind of knowledge which the Guru has stressed along with perceptual and rational knowledge is intuitive knowledge. The knowledge which is attained by a super-rational and super-sensuous faculty is called intuitive knowledge. It is mostly related with mysticism. The knowledge attained through such a faculty is considered related with higher truths of Reality which are above relations, while rational knowledge is knowledge about relations. Intuition has been understood very differently by many epistemologists. At one place, intuition has been defined as, “the direct and immediate apprehension by a knowing subject of itself, of its conscious states, of other minds, of an external world, of universals, of values, or of rational truths”.<sup>6</sup>

According to Guru Nanak Dev Ji, God has created man with his five sense-organs and subtle organs. Man has the faculty to know. When man reflects, and through reflection attains the rational knowledge, he becomes fearless, because knowledge destroys fear. For the knowledge gained through reflection and contemplation, the word ‘*gian-anjan*’ has been used by the Gurus, which refers to a process of knowledge.<sup>7</sup> And this process is related to reason. The seeker can have the knowledge of the secrets of Reality, if he keeps his mind open and receptive. His mental awareness is related to the higher Reality. According to Sri Guru Nanak Dev, knowledge<sup>8</sup> (*gian*) is something which is gained and the gaining or achieving of knowledge is related with perceptual and rational knowledge. Guru Nanak Dev has also used the word “*gian dhian*’ or ‘*gian vichar*’ for rational knowledge. Then knowledge (*gian*) is seen as *sojhi hoe*, which refers to intuition. Intuitive knowledge is the highest knowledge through which man is united with the higher truth. When man attains all the three kinds of knowledge, his consciousness expands and he knows the whole cosmos.

According to Guru Nanak Dev, intuitive knowledge is the highest knowledge which he calls a jewel (‘*gian ratan*,’).<sup>9</sup> It comes to the mind with the Grace of God. Through intuitive knowledge man attains the highest truth of life and the evil nature of man is destroyed. He becomes truthful. According to the Guru<sup>10</sup> knowledge is the emancipator of man. It leads to liberation, while Ignorance becomes the cause of man’s bondage. Without intuitive

knowledge, whatever man says or discusses is all vain and foolish, for it creates confusion.

The Guru has expressed the relation and interdependence of each kind of knowledge.<sup>11</sup> These do not oppose each other, but having their own areas of operation, they supplement each other. Without the help of reason, perception is not of much use, and reason does not become fruitful unless man intuits the essence of truth. When a mind is illumined by knowledge, it dispels the darkness of ignorance, as when a lamp is lit, its light dispels the darkness. So when man gains scriptural knowledge through reading and listening, his mind is rid of evil tendency, because ignorance gives rise to all wrongs and through scriptural knowledge ignorance vanishes. But, mere reading or listening of scriptures is just a routine matter, if it is without reflection. At the same time, mere reasoning or discoursing does not lead anywhere, if one does not intuit the essence of that knowledge. So perceptual knowledge, rational knowledge and intuitive knowledge supplement each other. Sri Guru Amardas<sup>12</sup> has referred to rational knowledge as the awakening of mind and ignorance as slumber. According to the Guru, rational knowledge is attained through reflection on virtues (*gun-vichar*). Through this, man's consciousness expands, and once this is achieved, he never loses the received knowledge. Then he has rational knowledge related with intuition which is called comprehension (*bujhna*). The intuitive knowledge is known through the Guru. This intuitive truth is known only to saints. Sri Guru Amardas has also used the word '*div drishti*' (celestial power)<sup>13</sup> for intuitive knowledge which dispels illusion.

From the above discussion it follows that the three kinds of knowledge are accepted and considered valid in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. They are: perceptual knowledge which is expressed through the words such as, "*dekhia* or *vekhia*, *sunia*, *jania*", etc. The perceptual knowledge is related with the universe, man, or the whole creation. Sensory knowledge is the first step towards the knowing of Truth. But sensory knowledge is not the only knowledge. There are truths which are above or beyond perceptual knowledge. These truths are known through rational knowledge. These truths are related with man's culture, religion, and man's relation with man, society, etc. Reason provides us with relational knowledge. But still there is a Reality which is above relations, the realisation of which is the ultimate goal of man's existence. Rational knowledge provides the

door to that knowledge but it cannot be apprehended through reason. That knowledge which is related with man's spiritual craving is intuitive knowledge. It is realized knowledge. Every kind of knowledge has its own sphere. One kind of knowledge does not interfere with the sphere of another. Rather they supplement one another.

The three aspects of knowledge mentioned above have been elaborated by Guru Nanak in the Japuji as hearing (*Suniai*), reflection (*manne*) and contemplation (*ek dhyān*). Hearing (*suniai*) is related to perceptual knowledge, reflection (*manne*) is concerned with rational knowledge, and contemplation (*dhyān*) is related to intuitive knowledge.

*Hearing (Suniai)* : Sri Guru Nanak Dev dealt in detail with the concept of hearing (*suniai*). In the Japuji four stanzas have been devoted to this concept. In *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, hearing (*suniai*) is related with the knowledge acquired through sensory organs, ears as well as the hearing of the Word (*shabad*). Though the hearing of the Word (*shabad*) involves the sensory organ, ear, but it is concerned with the spiritual perspective. It does not end with physical hearing, but this should continue till the spiritual transformation of the human personality takes place. In this context, the word (*shabad*) is to be sung along with hearing.<sup>14</sup> It is not mere drumming into the ear of a sound which does not reach the heart. It creates an inner atmosphere which is termed as "man rakhiai bhao" i.e. to keep the fear of God in mind. Here pain vanishes automatically, and happiness makes the heart its permanent abode. This leads to awakening of the mind.

Sri Guru Nanak Dev introduces the world of knowledge step by step. To know God the first step is to know His creation and this is made possible through hearing which is the first stage of knowledge. When we analyse relevant stanza of the *Japuji*, we come to know that by hearing we acquire the knowledge about: "(i) the lives of the realized persons and (ii) the various aspects of the world," as observed by a scholar.<sup>15</sup> The second stanza provides<sup>16</sup> to the seeker knowledge about beings of higher consciousness and the secrets of higher consciousness. In the third stanza,<sup>17</sup> the seeker acquires knowledge about the higher ethical principles such as truthfulness, moral qualities, contentment, purification and the virtues. It finally leads to the Source of All. In the fourth stanza<sup>18</sup> the seeker acquires knowledge of the application of wisdom by those who after acquiring knowledge

guide others on the right path.

*Reflection (Manne)* : After the first stage of knowledge, hearing follows the second stage of knowledge, namely, reflection (*manne*). As discussed by a learned scholar, Sri Guru Nanak Dev considers it necessary that the seeker should not only acquire knowledge by hearing (*suniai*) from the testimony of others, but he must reflect on what he 'hears'.<sup>19</sup>

In the first stanza about reflection<sup>20</sup> (*manne*) the Guru warns the seeker that the process of reflection cannot be fully described, and whosoever makes such a claim would at the end realize its futility. This failure to describe the process of reflection (*manne*), arises from the fact that the possibilities involved in reflection are so vast and infinite. In the second stanza it is stated that through reflection the consciousness of the mind and the intellect are fashioned and sharpened.<sup>21</sup>

In the third stanza<sup>22</sup> Sri Guru Nanak Dev holds that reflection (*manne*) removes all the hindrances from the path of the seeker.<sup>23</sup> A man of reason or reflection receives great honour and distinction. Reason clears his mind of waywardness and hesitation. He now walks on a straight, broad and clear path.

In the fourth and the last stanza<sup>24</sup> devoted to reflection, it is stated that the man of reflection realizes the ultimate aim of human life. According to the Guru, such a seeker of truth gets transformed and commits himself to the spiritual transformation of the people.

*Contemplation (Dhyan)* : The third stage of knowledge described by the Guru is called contemplation (*dhyan*). This has been referred by a scholar as single-minded contemplation.<sup>25</sup> As mentioned above, contemplation (*dhyan*) is the highest stage in the process of knowledge and results in gaining the purest knowledge. Contemplation, in the mystical sense, is knowledge consisting in the partial or complete link of the knower with the object of knowledge, with the consequent loss of one's individuality.

In *Japuji*, when the seeker achieves the third stage of knowledge i.e. contemplation (*dhyan*), he is known as the elect (*panch*).<sup>26</sup> This stage of knowledge, "indicates both hearing and reflection. We find that the term contemplation (*dhyan*) occurs even while the Guru discusses the various aspects of knowledge by hearing. The need to synthesize knowledge is, thus, stressed by Sri Guru Nanak Dev through this third aspect of knowledge. The synthesis, thus, is a constituent of the knowledge itself."<sup>27</sup>

The Guru<sup>28</sup> has given a beautiful simile to make it clear that

knowledge ripens through contemplation. One gets to the purest form of Truth in contemplation. This comes through His grace. Here, the *Dharma* has been compared to a flower and knowledge is its fruit which ripens with contemplation.

We shall now proceed to the second part of this paper where we shall analyse the concept of divine Reason (*hukam*) as the rational substratum of the universe. The uniformity of nature and the causal law may be seen as an important aspect of Reality. We shall discuss the concepts of the word (*shabad*), and the Truth (*sach*).

*Divine Reason (Hukam):* *Hukam* is an Arabic word, and, as a noun, is used for 'order'. According to F. Staingrass its meaning is "exercising authority, commanding, command, dominion, control, direction, influence, efficiency; and article of faith; proposition, relation, wisdom and knowledge".<sup>29</sup>

It has been used in different grammatical forms in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib as '*hukamao, hukmavai, hukmi, hukmu, hukme.. hukmai and hukmao*. But the concept remains the same in all these usages. The *hukam* seems to be used for the natural system or the coherent whole, which is perceived as an orderly cosmos. It has been used in the *Qu'ran*, but the sense in which it has been used as a concept in Sikhism, is not taken as such from Islam.

According to *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, *Hukam* appears to be used for the divine, or the higher order, reason. It leads us to the knowledge of causal relationship in nature. There is orderliness in nature. Things are very cordially related. To understand this relatedness and coherence is to understand divine reason (*hukam*).

According to Avtar Singh, "*hukam* as universal will (or divine will) can be understood to operate in two ways. It may be taken to operate as external to self as "Thou shalt do this. . ." as laid down in a series of commandments in scriptures. But in another and proper sense, in Sikhism, this *Hukam* or will may be understood to operate as internal to self".<sup>30</sup>

The word divine reason seems the most proper word for *Hukam* because it is not like authoritarian external order. It is within man. It is Divine Will which includes knowledge and that knowledge is reached through intuition. So it may be called Divine Reason.

Sri Guru Nanak Dev has referred to divine reason (*hukam*) as the potent factor for the removal of ignorance and falsehood.<sup>31</sup> Ignorance, here, is described as 'the wall of falsehood' (*kurai pali*). In answer to a question posed by Sn Guru Nanak Dev as to how

this wall of falsehood can be demolished, he himself later replies that it can be done, the falsehood and ignorance can be removed through divine reason (*hukam*). Sri Guru Nanak Dev, has, in the above hymn, established a polarity of divine reason (*hukam*) with ignorance. The divine reason (*hukam*) has, thus, clearly a cognitive element. Divine reason, *Hukam*, is neither blind nor devoid of cosmic cognitive element. It explains the precise and accurate nature of it (*hukam*). It also hints at its rational nature. When this divine reason (*hukam*) is said to be written 'within' (*likhia nali*) the self, it is also seen as the principle of illumination and knowledge.

It has been emphasized by the Gurus that knowledge is realized by knowing the rational nature of the universe.<sup>32</sup> The seeker is, time and again, reminded that the universe operates according to certain laws. The mathematical accuracy with which the events take place in nature display a rational character. Here reason and the causal accuracy appear to suggest that mathematics is the grammar of nature. The knowledge, or the empirical version of it in sciences, discover the ever on-going causal relation in various elements in the cosmos. The realization of knowledge beginning with awareness of the divine reason (*hukam*),<sup>33</sup> thus, appears to be the first step of wonder necessary for any sustained journey to the deeper and meaningful knowledge. It beacons the self to perceive the orderliness and rational nature of the cosmos, and it also sustains it through the levels of higher knowledge. It, thus, perceives of 'what is' to 'why is'. The concept of *hukam* is, therefore, intimately connected with the idea of reason.

The functioning of this divine reason is not limited to the physical sphere only. It also extends to the moral aspect of this universe in the form of the law of *karma*. Nothing is happening outside the divine reason (*hukam*). The relatedness of divine reason (*hukam*) and law of *karma* is called in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* '*hukam sanjogi*'. Divine reason (*Hukam*) is harmony and coherence; and to live in *hukam* is to live in harmony which leads to the perception of highest truth. Disharmony leads to animal living in the cycle of birth and death. The first Guru holds<sup>34</sup> that the true service to God is to be content in His Name and this is to realize divine reason (*hukam*). Such a person who realizes divine reason (*hukam*) within his self also realizes the Supreme self. Such persons are relieved of doubt and separation. Man comes into this world in accordance with his deeds under the system of divine reason, (*hukam*), so he should live in divine reason (*hukam*). In Sikhism, it is held that to



know God, to apprehend the Truth, man should have an insight into this divine reason (*hukam*). To know divine reason (*hukam*) and to follow divine reason (*hukam*), is the pre-condition to the vision of God (*the Hukami*). The conception of divine reason (*hukam*) does not shift from the physical to the moral sphere. The physical universe as well as the moral order are working together under divine reason (*hukam*). Nothing is out of it. Owing to this, the world is not a chaos, nor the blind fury of chance and elements. It is an ordered whole, working for a harmonious purpose.

*Uniformity of Nature:* As mentioned earlier, Sri Guru Nanak Dev has interpreted the principle of the uniformity of nature through the concept of divine reason (*hukam*). The right understanding of divine reason (*hukam*)<sup>35</sup> reveals an orderliness in nature which is knowable. If one penetrates deep into it, one can apprehend that the universe, its living beings, their excellences, miseries, and happinesses all come into existence according to the uniform law of nature which is based on divine reason (*hukam*). This has been further explained by the concept of nature (*qudrat*), according to which all seemingly different appearances are produced by the same cause which has been explained as '*teri qudrat*'. It has been interpreted by some scholars as '*His Power*'.<sup>36</sup> Through this divine reason (*hukam*) everything in nature is working in a rational pattern. The laws of nature are rational. They are not fortuitous. Nothing is accidental or by chance.<sup>37</sup> Chance represents our lack of understanding the order. There is causal uniformity which has been expressed through the concepts of divine reason (*hukam*) and nature (*qudrat*).

*The Word (Shabad):* The concept of hearing (*suniai*), reflection (*manne*) and contemplation (*dhyan*) has two aspects. In one aspect It is related with the hearing, reflection and contemplation of perceptual knowledge. The second aspect of it is related with the hearing, reflection and contemplation of the Word (*shabad*). Now, we shall discuss the meaning of the Word (*shabad*) in Sikhism.

The Guru have used the Word (*shabad*) in many different meanings in different contexts. One meaning among them can be said to be '*logos*', or Scripture, and in the sense of testimony (*pramana*), a source of knowledge. The Word (*shabad*) has been used in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* in different grammatical forms as *shabad*, *shabadah*, *shabadi*, *shabadu*, *shabada*, *shabadai* and *shabado*. But these different forms do not make any conceptual difference.

The Word (*Shabad*) is the knowledge which instructs man for

truthful living. Through the Word (*shabad*) man gets rid of all types of ignorance which are the cause of his separation from ultimate Truth. Through the Word (*shabad*) his mind and body both are brightened. According to the Gurus, the Word (*shabad*) helps the seeker in gaining knowledge in contemplation and in following the way of religion.<sup>38</sup> The Word (*shabad*) has also been viewed as the guiding force. When the Word (*shabad*) becomes the guiding force for man it becomes Guru.<sup>39</sup> Through *shabad* man's action and will are refined. They become as action and will of Guru, they become connoted with Guru's will. The Word (*shabad*) is the medium to understand the higher truths as divine reason (*hukam*).<sup>40</sup>

The Word (*shabad*)<sup>41</sup> as the expression of Reality is operative in every body. Reality is the true Word. This truth is realized through God's Grace, when He bestows Grace, man is attuned to truth which is the Word (*shabad*). In Sikhism, the Word (*shabad*) is the Guru and the Guru is the Word (*shabad*). Man is to learn the spiritual path from the Guru, who reveals Word (*shabad*) in the form of *Gurbani* which eventually became the Guru.

So in Sikhism, the Word (*shabad*) has been used in more than one sense. The Word (*shabad*) is the expression of the Reality. It is within man as immanent Reality. The Word (*shabad*) is the means of knowledge of the highest Truth, the Truth is attained through reflection and contemplation on the Word (*shabad*). The intuitive experience of Reality is expressed in the Word (*shabad*). So the Word (*shabad*) is the testimony. Again, ignorance and falsehood are removed through reflection and contemplation on the Word (*shabad*), which is to be received from the Guru. In Sikhism, the Word (*shabad*) is Guru.

*Truth (Sach)* : As discussed above the Word (*shabad*) is the only means of the knowledge of the highest Reality, the Truth. Now, we shall discuss the concept of Truth (*sach*). *Sach* is the Punjabi form of the Sanskrit word *sat*, which is a noun and its root in the Sanskrit language is *asi*. The meanings which the word implies are: being, existing, occurring, happening, being present, etc.<sup>42</sup> Its adjective is *satya*.<sup>43</sup> In *Hindu Dharam Kosh*, *satya* has been held as that which remains the same in the three divisions of time that is past, present and future.<sup>44</sup> In *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* both the forms i.e. *sach* as well as *sat* have been used.

In *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* truth (*sach*) has been used with three different meanings. Firstly, it is an attribute of Reality. Secondly, it is a quality of a proposition which has got the capacity for guiding

the conduct. Thirdly, truth (*sach*) has been referred to as a moral virtue. So it is concerned with the three areas: ontological - with the nature of Reality, epistemological - as a theory of truth or knowledge, and ethical - as a moral virtue. Here we are mainly concerned with the 'Truth', in the meaning of Being, the Reality, though we shall also refer to the other two aspects of truth (*sach*).

Interpreting *sati nam* in *Mulmantra*, it is held that the word (*sati*) here implies the *non-dualsati*. It is above *sat-asat* or *sach-jhuth* dualism, and implies the meaning of "a conscious being whose form is truth."<sup>45</sup>

Truth (*sach*) has also been described as having a capacity to guide the conduct of the seeker. According to *Sri Guru Nanak Dev*, truth (*sach*) is the panacea for the ills which afflict man. It washes the mind clean of all sins.<sup>46</sup> Truth (*sach*) as a moral virtue is realized when the seeker disciplines the baser interests and cultivates the angelic aspect of his personality.<sup>47</sup>

The word of the Guru (*Gurvak*) helps in realizing the Truth. It is a guide, the Pure, which illumines the heart and mind with its Light. Through its light the Reality is shown to man.<sup>48</sup> Such a man is termed as *sacha*, or *sachiar*, the True One, who is imbued with the highest Truth, the Ultimate Reality. In him, God's light becomes manifest which leads to the above mentioned results.<sup>49</sup>

From our discussion about truth (*sach*) and its attainment, we can say that to be a true one (*sachiar*) means to realize the unity of the self with the Truth (*sach*) or the Absolute. The seeker is to attain this unity not only through reflection, contemplation and intuition alone, but through his actions also. This combination is essential. He has to discipline his life in the way of the Gurus. This realisation or knowledge is not static, it is dynamic. The ideal of Truth, according to Sikhism, cannot be attained in seclusion. It is to be attained through participation in social life. Seclusion leads to escapism from the social responsibilities. But in Sikhism, the true one (*sachiar*) becomes dynamic and more conscious of his social responsibilities. He utilizes his knowledge for the improvement of the human society.<sup>50</sup>

According to *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* all creation and its expansion done by the Reality is true. The Creator and the creation both are True.<sup>51</sup> It Implies that all is real. There is no possibility of wrong and falsehood or evil in the Divine plan. Falsehood or evil exists only from the point of view of finite creatures. But they also have the potentialities of transcending these weaknesses and attain

Truth.

The Gurus consider ego (*haumai*) and egoistic vision (*maya*) to be the wall of falsehood that obstructs man from understanding the Truth. They give rise to many passions, like greed (*lobh*), infatuation (*moh*), enmity (*vair*) and discrepancy (*virodh*), etc. which separate man from the Reality. Ego (*haumai*) has been considered a basic malady, but the remedy is also there. when man recognises the negative role of the ego (*haumai*) within him, he can remove it, with the Grace of God.<sup>32</sup> When it is removed, man has the knowledge of Reality and the person becomes the conscious instrument of Reality.

To conclude our discussion, we can say that the Sikh Gurus have used deductive reasoning to demonstrate the theoretical as well as the practical aspects of reason. Our study of the material and the formal grounds of induction, has shown that the Gurus have explained the enduring foundations of human knowledge. The divine is not a postulate for denying the rational knowledge. On the contrary, it is the assurance of a higher order of coherence as the ground of our knowledge. It reinforces and sustains our effort for greater and greater, as well as deeper and deeper, knowledge and truer understanding and activity.

## REFERENCES

1. Monier Monier Williams, A *Sanskrit English Dictionary*, (Delhi, Moti Lal Banarsi Das, reprinted 1981)  
'Jnana', p. 426.
2. Dagobert, D. Runes, *Dictionary of Philosophy*, (Bombay: Jaico-Publishing House, 1957)  
'knowledge'.
3. Swami Satprakashananda, *Methods of Knowledge* (London: George Alien and Unwin Ltd. 1965), p.110
4. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, M.1, pA.  
asankh jap asankh bhau  
asankh puja asankh tap tau
5. *Ibid*, M.1, p.7.  
dharam khand ka eho dharam  
gian khand ka akhahu karam
6. Dagobert, D. Runes, *op.cit.*, 'Intuition'.
7. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, M.1, p. 57.  
gian anjanu bhaibhanjna dekhu niranjan bhae  
guptu pargat sabh janiai je manu rakhai thae

8. Sri Guru *Granth Sahib*, M.1, p.60.  
sacha nehu na tutai je satguru bhetai soi  
gian padarathu paiai tribhavan sojhi hoi
9. *Ibid.*, M.1, p.354.  
jan tudhu bhavai ta durmati jae  
gian ratanu mani vasai ae
10. *Ibid.*, M.1, p.466.  
haumai bujhai ta daru sujhai  
gian vihuna kathi kathi lujhai
11. *Ibid.*, M.1, p.791.  
Ugavai suru na japai chandu  
jah gian pargasu agianu mitantu  
beid pathu sansar ki kar  
parhi parhi pandit karahi bichar  
binu bujhe sabh hoe khuar
12. *Ibid.*, M.3, p.160.  
manmukh suta maya mohi piari  
gurmukhi jage gun gian bichari  
se jan jage jin nam piari, sahaje jagai savai na koi  
pure gur te bujhai janu koi
13. *Ibid.*, M.3' p.1016.  
Dib drisati jagai bharamu chukae gurparasadi param padu pae  
so jogi ihu jugati pachhanai gur kai sabadi bichari jio
14. *Ibid.*, M.1, p.2.  
gaviai suniai mani rakhiai bhau  
dukhu parhari sukhu ghari lai jae
15. Avtar Singh, *Ethics of the Sikhs*, (Patiala, Punjabi University, 1970)
16. Sri Guru *Granth Sahib*, M.1, p.2.  
suniai isaru brahma indu  
suniai mukhi salahanu mundu.
17. *Ibid.*, M.1, p.3.  
suniai satu santokhu gianu
18. *Ibid.*, M.1, p.8.  
suniai sara guna ke gah  
suniai sekh pir patisah
19. Avtar Singh, *op.cit.*, p.88.
20. Sri Guru *Granth Sahib*, p.3.  
manne ki gati kahi na jae  
Je ko kahai pichhai pachhutae
21. *Ibid.*, p.3.  
mannai surati hovai mani budhi  
mannai sagal bhavan ki sudhi
22. *Ibid.*, p.3.  
mannai maragi thak na pae  
mannai pati siu pargatu jae
23. Avtar Singh, *op.cit.*, p.90

24. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, p.3.  
mannai pavahi mokhu duara  
mannai parvarai sadharu
25. Avtar Singh, *op.cit.*, p.91.
26. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, p.3.  
panch parvan panch pardhanu, panchanka gur eku dhian.
27. Avtar Singh, *op.cit.*, p.91.
28. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, p.147.  
nanak guru santokhu rukhu dharamu phulu phalu gian  
ras rasia haria sada pakai karami dhian
29. Staingrass, F., *A Comprehensive Persian English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Oriental Books reprint corporation, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, first edition, 1973), p.426.
30. Avtar Singh, *op.cit.*, pp.30-31.
31. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, M.I, p.1.  
Kiv sachiara hoviai kiv kurhai tutai pali  
hukami rajai chalna nanak likhia nali
32. *Ibid.*, p.1, p.7.
33. *Ibid.*, M.I, p.1.  
hukami hovani akar hukamu na kahia jai  
hukami hovani jia hukami milai vadiai
34. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, p.421  
hukami rajai jo chalai so pavai khajanai  
hukami snjogi aia chalu sada rajai
35. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, M.I, p.1.  
hukami hovani akar hukami na kahya jae
36. Gopal Singh Dardi, translator, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*  
(Chandigarh: World University Press, 1978), p.457.
37. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, M.I, p.464.  
qudrati disai qudrati suniai qudrati bhau sukh saru  
nanak hukamai andari vekhai vartai tako taku
38. *Ibid.*, p.223.  
eku sabad ik bhikhia mangai  
gianu dhianu jugati sachu jagai
39. *Ibid.*, p.225.  
durmat agani jagat parjarai  
so ubrai gur sabadu bicharai
40. *Ibid.*, M.I, p.940.  
hukame avai hukame javai hukame rahai samaei  
pure gur te sachu kmavai gati miti sabade paei
41. *Ibid.*, M.I, p.1275.  
chahudisi hukamu varatai prabhu tera chahudisi name pataln  
sab mahi sabadu varatai parabhu sacha karami milai baialn
42. M.M. Williams, *op.cit.*, 'asi', p.1134.
43. Shiv Ram Apte, 'satya', p.1063.
44. Rajbali Pandey, *op.cit.*, p.650.

45. Bhai Vir Singh, Santhya Sri Guru Granth Sahib,  
Vol. 1 (Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, Hall Bazar, Nov.,1961), p.12.
46. Sri *Guru Granth Sahib*, M.1, p.468.  
sachu ta paru janiai ja ridai sacha hoe  
sachu sabhna hoe daru papu kadhai dhoe
47. *Ibid.*, M.1, p. 463.  
Nanak sachu dhiyaini sachu
48. *Ibid.*, M.1, p.687.  
sansaru rogi name tharu mailu lagai sach bina  
gur vaku nirmalu satha chananu nit sachu tirathu manjna
49. *Ibid.*, M.1, p.1112.  
sachu gharu khoji lahe...  
nanak sacha sachai racha gurmukhi tariai tari
50. *Ibid.*, M.5, pp.272-73.  
brahamugiani parupkar oumaha
51. *Ibid.*, M.5, pp.1073-74.  
sacha takhatu sachi patisahi  
sachi kudarti sachi bani sachu sahib sukhu kija he
52. *Ibid.*, M.2, p.466.  
Haumai thiragh rogu hai tharu bhi esu mahi





SECTION II

MEHODOLOGY



## 9

AN INTEGRATED METHODOLOGY FOR APPRAISAL OF  
SOURCES FOR SIKH STUDIES

GOBIND SINGH MANSUKHANI

Sikhism has now been accepted as one of the major world religions. As such, it provides a new area for Religious studies. Western scholars have taken this opportunity to undertake its study. They try to evaluate the Sikh religion using their techniques and criteria of various other academic disciplines like history, sociology, philosophy, linguistics, anthropology, etc. Their methodologies though valid in their own materialistic fields, are not so useful for the in-depth evaluation of a sovereign and revelatory religion like Sikhism. Some of their narrow and often distorted approaches to Sikhism remind one of the stories of the six blind men's opinions, on "What is an elephant like?" I am therefore making a plea for a balanced, homogenous and impartial examination of the sources of Sikh Studies.

The primary sources for Sikh studies are the Guru Granth Sahib, accepted Gurbani in the Dasam Granth, and the approved compositions of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nandlal. The Secondary sources are, the Janamsakhis, Gurbilas series, Hukam-namas, Gurmattas, Rahat-namas and other books by writers from the 18th century to the present time. Where primary sources are silent, secondary sources can be useful. A secondary source, like *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin* by Sohan Kavi in 1718 throws light on the events in the life of the Sixth Guru. *Prachin panth Prakash* of Rattan Singh Bhangu furnishes ample details on the *Missal* period on the second half of the 18th century. But their value is primarily historical. Another important secondary source is Giani Gian Singh's *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*; Kavi Santokh Singh's *Gurpartap Suraj* (1843) has given valuable information on many other aspects of Sikh history. The Mushm wnters, especially those connected with the Moghul Court, have frequently supplied biased or wrong information in

their books and chronicles, which has often misled European writers of the 19th century. About the only exception is J.D. *Cunningham's history of the Sikhs* (1848). They all throw some light on the Sikhs, their beliefs, practices and institutions but that has to be seen in the perspective of the handicap mentioned above. The new methodology which I am suggesting in this paper consists mainly of two parts - a consideration of Sikh tradition, and its relevance in *Gurmat* or Sikh philosophy and values.

### I. ORAL HISTORY

Sikh traditions are a part of Oral History. This has recently been recognised as a valid component of any scholarly study. It was "established in 1948 as part of a modern technique, for historical documentation when Columbia University historian Allan Nevins, began recording memoirs of persons significant in American life"<sup>1</sup>. It includes verbal testimonies, reported statements, legends, anecdotes, precedents, folk-tales etc. Prof. Nevins wrote: "The history of a nation is not in Parliaments and battle-fields, but in what the people say to each other on fair days and high days and in how they farm, quarrel and go on pilgrimage".<sup>2</sup> The secondary sources of Sikh studies mentioned above fall under the "Discipline of Oral History".

Western scholarship regarding Sikhism suffers from three main handicaps. *Firstly*, many scholars de-value Sikhism by regarding it as a branch of Hinduism or as a mixture of other "isms". For example, Dr. W.H. McLeod regards Guru Nanak's gospel as a compound of Vaishnavism, Nathism and Santism.<sup>3</sup> He does not realise the distinctiveness of Sikhism or that Guru Nanak proclaimed a unique Faith and Revelation. Guru Arjan made this clear in Guru Granth Sahib, He wrote:

"Na hum Hindu, Na Musalmaan". (GGS, p.1136).

(I am neither a Hindu nor a Muslim)<sup>4</sup>

The attitude of the German scholar - Ernest Trumpp - was equally narrow, nay hostile. His approach was linguistic; as such, he failed to understand the religious thoughts expressed in the Adi Granth, which he translated in part. He did not realise that the Gurus had only used the current and popular terminology in a new connotation. They gave a new meaning to popular words. For example, the word "Guru" in Hindu usage 'means a religious teacher or holy man, but in Sikhism Guru stands for the *Bani* or the *Word* or even God Himself (True Guru). "Bani Guru, Guru hai Bani, which Bani amrit sare." (GGS, p.982) "Wah Wah BaniNirankar hai,

tis jevad avar na koi.” (GGS, p.515)

Secondly, Trumpp had no patience or perseverance. He wrote in the Preface: “The Sikh Granth is a very big volume which I find incoherent and shallow in the extreme and couched at the same time, in dark and perplexing language in order to cover these defects. It is for us occidentalists, a most painful and stupefying task to read even a single raga.” No wonder Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha complained to the Vicerol of India of the unsatisfactory nature of Trumpp’s translation.<sup>5</sup>

The *second* handicap for a western scholar is that he is primarily acquainted only with the Semitic religions and so his mind is pre-conditioned. He is often biased against eastern religions, which require a new approach, for they are based on different philosophies and visions. They call Sikhism a “Tradition”, which is less than a “Religion”, though it has all the elements and criteria of a world religion, namely “religious community, ritual, ethics, social and political involvement, Scripture, concepts, aesthetics, and spirituality”.<sup>6</sup> Even so, some of the western scholars like McLeod and Juergensmeyer question its inclusion as such. The latter states: “Perhaps the most important difficulty with Sikhism for the compilers of “World Religion” text-books is the question of whether Sikhism is, indeed a religion.”<sup>7</sup> This sort of concealed bias is evident in “their categories of analysis which inevitably tend to distort as much as they reveal”.<sup>8</sup> A word like “Syncretism” applied to Sikhism implies that while *our* (western) religion is ‘revealed’, *theirs* (Sikhism) is a mere syncretism.

Similarly, a remark like the following shows the subtle twist and distortion to reflect adversely on the Sikh identity: “Much of Sikh distinctiveness would vanish if a community like the Sikhs were to become modern in religion and social practice, and the cement that binds the community would disappear as well.”<sup>9</sup> A slanted approach to Sikhs is obvious in the following remarks: Whereas for Nanak the ultimate matter was devotion to the True Name, for the present community, self-preservation appears more important.”<sup>10</sup> Would it not apply to another religious community, say, for example, Christians and Jews struggling for survival on account of hostile and tyrannical rulers.

There is no denying the fact that western writers often employ one set of criteria for evaluating Semitic religions and another set of criteria for assessing Oriental religions. Such approach, apart from being unfair, is neither rational nor academic.

“Even when the tool of comparison/ contrast is used, the differential treatment which the Sikh religion has received at their hands is often negative.

The *third* handicap is the actual analytical methodology as applied to the study of the principles and practices of religion. I am not against rational standards and scientific techniques in general, but to apply them to Revelations or to metaphysical experiences is not only fruitless, but also counter-productive. In this context Dr. S. Radhakrishnan wrote: “Indian philosophy makes unquestioned and extensive use of reason, but intuition is accepted as the only method through which the ultimate can be known.....Intellectual knowledge is not enough”.<sup>10A</sup>

### 11 THE DRAWBACKS OF ANALYTICAL METHOD OLOCY

The analytical method is not suited to the perception of matters of the spirit, as for example on God, on the Creation, to mortal's goal and his spiritual nature. *Firstly*, the laws of logical proof cannot be applied to the experiential aspect of man and his feelings of Love, Beauty, Truth, Peace, Happiness. These cannot be analysed, even though they form the very sources of man's uplift. The vision of God is not subject to verification. God is beyond physical observation, beyond time and space (Akal Moorat). Spiritual experiences cannot be analysed, nor can revelation or hymnody be subjected to dissection. You destroy the beauty and fragrance of a flower if you rub its petals to locate its tenderness and aroma. How can one probe or verify the revelation of Guru Nanak, except by his own testimony given in the Adi Granth.<sup>11</sup>

In this connection, the words of James Hastings, author of the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics are quite relevant. He says: “The very nature of the subject of religion forbids one-sided treatment, which obviously the analyst's method entails. He is an outsider watching another religion different from his own. This demands impartiality and objectivity. He has to be careful and cautious in avoiding treading on another's toes,” He therefore lays stress on the golden rule of criticism, “that the study must be conducted with the clearest recognition of the fact that the subject concerns the most vital beliefs and practices of human beings, all of which, on purely scientific grounds, be regarded as closely related physiologically and psychologically. Further, it must be pursued as thoroughly as possible, with that consideration for the conviction of others, that one would ask for one's own.”

<sup>12</sup> In other words, would the analyst judge his own religion with the same

yard-stick he applies to another religion? Western scholars include 'myths' in the history of their own religion, while rejecting similar myths in other religious traditions. In this connection the following observation of D'Flaherty is quite relevant: "I don't think we need to regard our own history as myth, but I think we have a misplaced faith in our secular records of the past that we enshrine in the word 'history', which word we then refuse to accord to other peoples', records, secular or scriptural."<sup>12A</sup>

*Secondly*, the 'external' approach in itself excludes sympathy with the religion under study. Prof. C. Biswas remarks in this connection: "For it would be incontrovertibly demonstrated that systems of religious thought are also very significant conceptual systems, like the analyst's own, having their own complete set of rules and terms, tools and procedures, so as justifiably to demand a proper examination from within also, before any final assessment in regard to their meaningfulness or otherwise is made". This alternate approach is called the "Rationality of faith". M.A. Stole wrote in this connection: "There is a rational *sui generis* in religious thought, that is not encompassed by science, and by the purely scientific standards of the reasonable acceptance of hypothesis or rationality, whose nature and significance are now only beginning to be understood".<sup>13</sup>

*Thirdly*, the analytical critic of religion tends to neglect the spiritual nature of man. Man is not only the body, but also the mind and the soul. Dr. Alister Hardy, a former Professor of Zoology at Oxford University wrote: "Man's religious and spiritual experiences are shown in his feelings for a transcendental reality, a desire that some thing other than himself can be actually sensed, a desire to personalise this presence as a deity to have a private I-Thou relationship with it, communicating through prayer".<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere, he observed: "Science cannot deal with the essence of religion any more than it can with the nature of art or the poetry of human love".<sup>15</sup> Religion is an inner experience, beyond the prism-pendulum-chronograph methods of the scientist or the materialistic standards of criticism.

Let us take some examples of the analytical method from Dr. McLeod's works on Sikh studies. He does not accept the *Janamsakhis* as reliable narratives on Guru Nanak's life. He devalues them and rejects most of them as depicting miracles or other improbable events. Of 124 stories of Guru Nanak, listed by him, 29 stones are discredited on the grounds that they are miracle

stories, including the important ones like “Panja Sahib” and “Visit to Mecca”. The Panja Sahib story is unacceptable to him as “an aetiological legend” and he excludes it. Dr. N.Q. King challenges McLeod’s rejection of the story, affirming that “critical scholarship has here performed less than its best with regard to one of the sacred things for which the Sikhs are willing to lay down their lives (a reference to the Train Tragedy in 1921, when the train crushed to death a number of Sikhs at Hasan Abdal Railway Station). A few chance remarks by passers-by and the reports of later visitors, is enough to produce the label ‘invention by tradition.’”<sup>16</sup> Dr. King’s comment is that McLeod should have used his better judgment and lived up to the basic tenet of critical scholarship: “If you ask an ancient source a question, and it gives a nonsense reply, rethink your question”.<sup>17</sup> Three other stories are rejected, because McLeod thinks, they were introduced to provide settings for the Guru’s verses. Even stories common to all the Janamsakhies are rejected as for example, the visit to mount Sumer, the discourse with Shaikh Ibrahim, the cannibal’s cauldron, while others are rejected on the ground of lack of corroboration,<sup>18</sup> John Carman criticises McLeod’s approach to the Janamsakhis as under:

“Unfortunately, his (McLeod’s) application of rationlist historical standard in evaluating the Janamsakhis deprives him of most of the very evidence he seeks concerning of the nature of Guru Nanak’s personality, for this evidence seems to me most clearly to be found in the impact of the Guru on his immediate followers and those of the following generations.<sup>18A</sup>

In short, out of 124 stories, he dismisses 87 as either impossible, improbable or possible. The remaining 37 stories he considers ‘Probable’. He sums up the life of Guru Nanak in a little over one page.<sup>19</sup>

McLeod forgets that the Janamsakhis are not biographies, in the sense in which we understand them today. Prof. J.A. Veitch writes in this connection: “Stories which are part and parcel of all religious traditions provide the media through which truths are expressed. The question to be asked of stories illustrating difficult incidents in the life of founders of the great religious traditions (such as Guru Nanak, Goutama Buddha, Muhammed and Jesus) is not “Did it really happen in the way described?” but “What religious truth is being expressed in the story?” However, with his negative approach, McLeod only highlights the hagiographic nature of the Janamsakhis, and their general lack of reliability, as



far as the historical Nanak is concerned. He states his draconian dictum as follows: "Unlike the prisoner in a court of law, Janamsakhis must be held guilty until proved innocent".<sup>19A</sup> Returning to the analytical study of the Janamsakhis, as attempted by McLeod we may note that he has rejected an important event of the Guru's life on minor points of interpretation. Guru Nanak's visit to Baghdad and his meeting with Bahlol Dana is dismissed on flimsy grounds. Bhai Gurdas (1551-1637) wrote clearly that Guru Nanak did visit Baghdad. His source of information would be Baba Buddha who was also a contemporary of Guru Nanak. Moreover, this visit is confirmed by Swami Anand Acharya, who in his book entitled *Snow-birds* wrote a poem entitled "On reading an Arabic inscription in a shrine outside the town of Baghdad, dated 912 Hijra":

"Here spoke the Hindu Guru Nanak to Fakir Bahlol,  
And for these sixty winters, since the Guru left Iran,  
The soul of Bahlol has rested on the Master's word -  
Like a bee poised on a dawn-lilt honey-rose".

The English translation of the Turkish/Arabic inscription provided by the late Dr. Ganda Singh, an eminent historian and linguist is as under:

"See how the most Glorious Lord God fulfilled the wish  
That for Baba Nanak new structure he built,  
Seven saints helped (therein)-  
That its date (worked out to be that)

The fortunate disci'le made to flow to new (spring or well of) water  
in the land. 927".<sup>20</sup>

Prof. Harbans Singh offers an alternate rendering by J. Tekin and says that the tradition of the visit to Baghdad is strong and persistent.<sup>21</sup> McLeod relies entirely on the translation of Mr. Menage and states that the inscription does not refer to Guru Nanak.<sup>22</sup> This is rather surprising in view of the amount of evidence substantiating the visit of Guru Nanak to Baghdad given by *Janamsakhis* especially *Vilayawali Janamsakhi* and *Meherban Janamsakhi*.

Similarly McLeod rejects Guru Nanak's visit to Mecca though is confirmed by Bhai Gurdas and supported by Meherban Janamsakhi. How unreasonable it is for McLeod to throw out an Incident which is confirmed additionally by a majority of Janamsa khis.

Dr. McLeod's *first* myth, in his own words, is, "The means of

salvation consists in loyalty to the person of Baba Nanak and the acceptance of his teachings". This is not correct because a soul's deliverance is also a possibility in any other religion, for the Guru Granth Sahib accepts the validity of all other Faiths:

"Jagat jalanda rakh leh apnee kirpa dhar,

Jit duware ubare titay leh ubar." (GGS. p.853)

(O Lord! Save this burning world through your grace,

Save the people, by whatever way (religious path) they can be saved.

Dr. McLeod' *second* myth is that the function of Janamsakhis is "to behold the presence of Baba Nanak, or in other words, his *darshan*". He elucidates this point in the following words: "The primary purpose of the Janamsakhis was to provide that permanent presence or at least a satisfactory substitute (or in other words), a verbalised record of past situations. Death, disability or distance need not raise any insuperable obstacles to regular *darsan*, for *darsan* could be obtained through the true testimony (sakhi) of the Guru's life and utterances. The understanding of *darsan* which this implied, was the same as the understanding of a personal *darsan*. Whereas for some devotees, a personal visit to the chosen Master would necessarily involve some direct teaching and also observing of the Master's own example, others would be content to merely appear before him. The same variety of understanding could also be applied to the Janamsakhis ... Faith alone was not enough. There must also be personal participation".<sup>23</sup> This insistence on *darsan* or personal participation in beholding the presence of the Guru, as a great spiritual attainment, is not in accordance with the Guru's personal view. In his Scripture, the Guru abserves:

"Satgur noo subh ko vekhada, jeta sagal sansar,

Dithhe mukt na hovaee, jab lag sabad na kare veechar".  
(GGG, p.594)

(The whole world has a sight of the Guru. Only looking at him, brings no liberation, that only comes from devotion to the Holy word). Spiritual merit is not acquired by *darsan*, but by putting into practice the Guru's word. That is why a proper understanding of the basic Sikh postulates is necessary before writing on any topic of Sikh studies. It is evident that writers whether western or eastern would continue making such obvious mistakes and misinterpretation so long as they remain ignorant of the Gurubani, the Sikh thesis and its doctrines.

### III BHATT-VAHIS

Another important source of Sikh Oral History recently discovered is the so-called *Bhatt-vahis*, which are the family chronicles and diaries maintained by *Bhatt* families during the last four centuries. The *Bhatts* were descendents of *Bhatt Bhagirath* and devotees of *Guru Amardas*. Some of the poetic compositions of *Bhagirath's* grandson, namely, *Mathura*, *Jalap* and *Kirat* are actually included in *Guru Granth Sahib*. Their descendents *Karsindhu* and *Talunda* lived in the *Jind* district of the *Punjab*, with some relatives settling in *Jagadhri* and *Saharanpur*. They wrote in a script called "Bhatakshri". *Giani Garja Singh* (1904-1977) studied these records and found in them confirmation of certain events in past Sikh History. We have in the *Bhatt-vahis* a lot of information on *Guru Arjan* and also *Guru Hargobind's* life, with the chronology of his wars with the *Moghuls*. The later records also furnish useful information on *Guru Tegh Bahadur*. They give details of his first arrest at *Dhamtan* and his confinement in prison at *Sarhind* from which the *Guru* was released, and later re-arrested on 12th July 1675 at *Malikpur* and sent to *Delhi* with his followers, subsequently to be executed. *Bhatt-Vahi Jadavbansian* records that the body of *Guru Tegh Bahadur* was cremated in a house situated on the outskirts of *Delhi* called *Raisana* <sup>24</sup>

The *Bhatts* were keenly interested in the activities of *Guru Gobind Singh*. *Bhai Sewa Ram's Shahid Vilas* gives us reliable data on the life and achievements of important Sikhs in the later *Moghul* period. <sup>25</sup> They also throw light on the work of *Bhai Mani Singh*. Further, extracts from the *Bhatt-vahis* are included in the book of *S.S. Gandhi*. <sup>26</sup> Such sources must now be re-studied, for they may supply the missing links in our present knowledge of Sikh history.

### IV GURMAT

Another important criterion of the proposed methodology is to relate the secondary sources and the events and actions they disclose to the test of Sikh ontology and its basic *Gurmat* validity. This would enable us to show how Sikh beliefs and practices are different from the basic concepts of Hinduism. For example, take the *Mool-mantra* which gives a fine outline of the nature of God and the basic Sikh creed:

*IK OANKAR SATNAM.....GUR PARSAD.*

*McLeod* equates *OM* with *OANKAR* as shown below in his book on *Guru Nanak*. <sup>27</sup>

IOM sati Namu karta purukha nirvairu akal murati ajuni saibhan gur prasadi.

These two are much different. Perhaps this matter will need to be discussed at another time and in another place.

I may now state the essence of *Gurmat* in a few formulations below:

1. The world is real and life's problems must be faced with courage.
2. Man has the capacity to experience the Divine. The Guru says: "Man! you are an embodiment of light; Know your roots, for God is within you". (GGG.p.441)  
The goal of human life is the total development of the body, mind and soul, so as to liberate the self from egoism while still alive.
3. Family life and society provide the best forum for the practice of righteousness. In it, both men and women have equal rights and opportunities and can help each other in secular attainment and spiritual fulfilment.
4. The main hurdle to God-realisation within the self is the Ego. This can be crushed by leading a life of humility and service.
5. Self-discipline and self-development go hand in hand. Honest and selfless living, sharing one's earnings with others in need, and following the path of virtue are the steps to self-realisation.
6. Fear not and frighten not; maintain human dignity and freedom. When confronted by injustice and tyranny, Sikhism encourages resistance. Only when all peaceful methods have failed, is armed resistance permissible. Militarisation is often the last-resort remedy for the vindication of human dignity and moral values.
7. Devotion to God and an awareness of His attributes give man a sense of peace and bliss, confirming his strong belief that leading a truthful life is higher than Truth.
8. Salvation in Sikhism does not require self-mortification or deprivation, but the establishment of a link with God. We should retain our own identity and seek for bliss in our daily chores and duties.
9. Meditation encourages God-Awareness; it is available to all. So a Sikh desires social salvation or uplift of the community, so that the world may become a better place to live in.
10. A Khalsa - baptised Sikh - should follow the strict discipline

of the *Rahat-Maryada*. He becomes a saint-soldier who serves as a torch-bearer to others. He should destroy the forces of evil and authoritarianism and promote goodness.

11. Finally, the goal of the Sikhs is to establish a just social order with peace and prosperity for the world. The Guru had this vision, which is expressed in the Sikh Scripture as under:

“Hun Hukam hoa meharman da - Koun Kisay Rajavinda”.

(GGG. p.74)

(Now is the gracious Lord's ordinance promulgated; none to another shall cause hurt;

All mankind now in peace shall abide-gentle shall the governance be.)

*Gurmat* is consistent in its doctrines and philosophy. The Gurus practised what they preached. Some incidents or so-called facts mentioned in some secondary sources do not tally with *Gurmat*, and as such, they have to be rejected, because they are against the principles of Sikhism. For example, the author of *Gurbilas* states that Guru Gobind Singh worshipped a goddess called Naina Devi;<sup>28</sup> this is in opposition to *Gurmat* and is to be rejected. In case of any difficulty or controversy, one should apply the test of *Gurmat*. Some of the controversies can be settled by reference to the GURU GRANTH SAHIB. One such case arose in 1920 in the Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, when the priests (pujaris) refused to accept the *Karah Parsad* offered by some Mazabhi Sikhs. The refusal being inconsistent with Gurbani was given up and the *Parsad* accepted.

Guru Gobind Singh before his death, passed on his spiritual succession to the Guru Granth Sahib, and his temporal succession to the Khalsa Panth. The Khalsa Panth was given a collective authority, to pass *Gurmatta* on any problem or in an emergency facing the Sikh Community. A *Gurmatta* as a Guru's decision is respected by the entire Sikh community. During the 18th century when the Sikhs were joined in a grim struggle for their own survival, they always implemented *Gurmattas*. In any case of collective contingency or future problem, the final forum is with a *Gurmatta* arrived at in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, when the issue before it, could be decided.

## V CONCLUSION

In the study of a religion, there are two distinct areas, namely, (i) historical authenticity of the record, (ii) the internal consistency of the religious doctrines and practices. The technique of analysis

has to be used carefully and separately in these two categories. To interpret any lack of a written corroboration, either of an historical event as proof of its non-event, or as an inconsistency in its philosophical system or principles, is bad logic. One cannot challenge the Sikh way of life, simply because it may lack corroborative evidence in some detail in the secondary sources. As such, the integrated methodology mentioned above will not only be useful, but also richly improve the quality of Sikh studies.

## REFERENCES

- 1 Thompson *Paul: The Voice of the Past - Oral History* (Oxford) p.54.
- 2 *Oral History Review*, 1980, p.2S.
- 3 McLeod: *Evolution of the Sikh Community*, p.S.
- 4 Translation of the Punjabi quotation which preceeds is given within brackets.
- 5 *Sikh Review*, June 1974, p.46.
- 6 Frank Whaling & Kenneth Holmes Ed. *Compassion through Understanding*, p.172,1988.
- 7 M. Juergensmeyer & N.G. Barrier: *Sikh Studies*, Berkley, 1979, p.1S.
- 8 James R. Lewis: *some Unexamined Assumptions in Western Studies of Sikhism*, *The Sikh Courier*, London (Spring/Summer 1989) p.1
- 9 Juergensmeyer (Ibid) E.F. Irschick's article: "Sikhism as a Category of Study", p.53
- 10 R. D. Baird & Alfred Bloom: *Indian and Far Eastern Religious Traditions*, p.105, 1972.
- 10A S.Radha Krishnan & A.C. Moore: *A source-book in Indian Philosophy*, XXIV
- 11 See page 150 of the *Adi Granth*.
- 12 James Hastings: *Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics*, Vol. 10, p.662.
- 12A D' Flahesty : *Other People Myths*, p.172.
- 13 Stole M.A *Reason and Scepticism*, p.215.
- 14 A Hardy: *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, p.13l.
- 15 A Hardy: *The Biology of God*, p.4.
- 16 A Hardy: *The Biology of God*, p.4.
- 17 Gurdev Singh: *Perspectives*, p.51.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p.50.
- 18A Harbans Singh : *Perspectives on Guru Nanak*, p.377.
- 19 McLeod: *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, p.146.
- 19A *Ibid.*, *The Evolution of the sikh Community*,, p.26

- 20 Papers on Guru Nanak, Punjabi Univ. Patiala, p.194.
- 21 Harbans Singh: Guru Nanak and the Origins of the Sikh Faith, p.228.
- 22 McLeod: Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, p.132.
- 23 McLeod: Early Sikh Tradition, p.242.
- 24 Harbans Singh: Guru Tegh Bahadur, Delhi, 1980, p.101.
- 25 S.S. Gandhi: History of the Sikh Gurus, 1978, p.585.
- 26 Ibid., pp.586-591.
- 27 McLeod: Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, p.163.
- 28. Sohan Singh Seeal : Sikh Ithas de Somay (in Punjab), Ludhiana, P.297.





SECTION III  
SIKH HISTORY



## 10

GURU ARJAN DEV - THE FIFTH NANAK  
AN APOSTLE OF PEACE (1563-1606)

SURINDER SINGH KOHLI

In the Var Ramkali of Satta and Balwand in *Guru Granth Sahib*, it is recorded: "Now Arjan, the Guru, is seated on Nanak's throne, his canopy sparkles and illumines the four corners of the world." Another bard Kala says, "Guru Ramdas blessed Guru Arjan like philosopher's stone, which transmutes all it touches into gold." (Adi Granth p.1404). Another bard Mathura says, "In the sea of Kali age, the Lord's Name has become manifest through Guru Arjan to save the world." (Adi Granth p.1409). Bhai Gurdas, the Sikh theologian writes in his twenty-fourth Var: "People from all the four directions bowed to him (Guru Arjan) and the innumerable Sikhs used to assemble in his presence. The *Guru-Shabda* or the Name of the Lord was served freely; the perfect Guru had the perfect discipline. There waved God's canopy over the Gurmukh (the Enlightened one), who was immersed in the Supreme State of the Unity with the Transcendent Lord." (Pauri 20) Such is the first hand report about the personality of Guru Arjan Dev.

*A Short Sketch of the Life of Guru Arjan Dev:* Guru Arjan Dev was the youngest son of Guru Ramdas, the fourth Sikh Guru. Out of his two brothers Mahadev was a recluse, but the eldest Prithi Chand was a highly self-centred and unspiritual person. As soon as decision for succession was announced, he turned violently hostile towards Guru Arjan Dev and caused great problems for him. He proclaimed himself as the Guru and created a cleavage among the Sikhs, though his machinations were thwarted to a great extent by the two venerable Sikhs Baba Buddha and Bhai Gurdas. He remained inimical towards the Guru throughout his life and even approached and conspired with the like-minded officials for

regaining the high position of Guruship. He even tried to poison Hargobind, the son of Guru Arjan Dev, so that his own son Mehervan should get the next chance of Guruship. He and his son began to compose hymns under the name "Nanak" in order to be recognised as suitable successors to the previous Gurus, because Guru Arjan Dev had begun to compose hymns at a very early age, and which had attracted the attention of his father.

The Sikh organisation was firmly established by two important works undertaken by Guru Arjan Dev. He prepared the basic scripture of the Sikh Religion, compiling the hymns and compositions of not only the Sikh Gurus preceding him, but also the hymns of the like-minded pre-Nanak radical saints. On a complaint from the adversaries of the Guru, the Emperor, Akbar the Great, satisfied himself that there was nothing antagonistic in it towards other religions, especially Islam. The other important work that was undertaken by the Guru was the completion of the tank and the construction of a central holy shrine for the Sikhs, where they could gather on significant occasions. Because of great financial necessity for the Panth and for building the shrine, the Guru asked all his Sikhs to donate one-tenth of their income (*daswandh*) in the name of the Guru. The Muslim news writers considered such donation as a tax levied by the Guru.

*Erection of the Sikh Shrine by Guru Arjan Dev:* The site achieved prominence in the times of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak Dev, during his journeys, met the young Buddha (Baba Buddha) at this place, who played a prominent part in the Sikh movement. The site lay amidst the villages of Sultan wind, Tung, Gumtala and Gilwali in the *pargana* of Jhabal. The third Sikh Guru, Guru Amar Das, selected this site for his son-in-law Ramdas, on whom he wanted to bestow the Guruship and thus keep him away from his own progeny, in order to avoid any clash. It is believed that the land of the site was granted to Guru Amar Das by Emperor Akbar, when he met the Guru at Goindwal on his way to Lahore. But most probably, the land was presented by the inhabitants of Sultanwind out of their great reverence for the Guru. The legendary importance of the site known to the people of the area about the episode of Rajani, a daughter of Rai Duni Chand, a *kardar* (revenue-collector) of Patti highlights the medicinal properties of the waters of the pool. She is said to have brought her leper-husband here, who, after having a dip in the pool, was cured of the ailment. Guru Amar Das passed away in A.D. 1574 and in the same year his successor Guru

Ramdas settled down by the site of the pool. The original habitation was known by the name Chak. Because of its association with the Guru, it was called Chak Guru or Guru ka Chak, sometimes called Chak Guru Ramdas. Later on it came to be known as Ramdas Pura.

*Construction of the tank:* Guru Ramdas formulated his plan of the construction work of the tank and the town. Undoubtedly, some elementary work regarding the tank was begun by Guru Amar Das, but most of the work of excavation was accomplished in the time of Guru Ramdas. Bhai Gurdas has referred to this task of excavation in his first Var. Originally, the tank became famous as Ramdas Sar or Ramdas Sarovar. These names occur in the verses of Guru Arjan Dev in the *Adi Granth* alongwith the name of the town as Ramdas Pur. It is recorded that at the time of excavation, the Guru used to sit under a Ber tree and supervise the work. The *Amrit Sarovar* or the holy tank remained enclosed in *kachcha* construction until A.D. 1581, when Guru Arjan Dev ascended the throne of Guruship. Then the tank was made *pucca* and the stairs of the enclosure were bricked. The bottom of the tank was also attended to. A great deal of voluntary service was done by the Sikhs and with their selfless and enthusiastic efforts, the construction work of the tank was completed within a short period. The Guru attributed the feat to the Grace of the Lord. The name of *Amritsar* (the tank of nectar or immortality) was given to the tank and the city also came to be known by this name. While the work of the construction of the tank was still going on, the Guru had consultations with the elderly and devout Sikhs, especially Baba Buddha, regarding the construction of the holy shrine. It was ultimately decided by him that the shrine be built in the centre of the tank, where the Name of the Lord is symbolised. This shrine would be the Lord's shrine (*Har Mandir*). The plan of the Guru was welcomed by the Sikhs.

*The foundation stone laying of Harmandir:* According to the tradition, the foundation of the sacred shrine was laid by Hazrat Mian Mir, the famous contemporary Sufi saint of the Qadiri Order in A.D. 1588. Chulam Muhayy-ud-Din alias Bute Shah states in his work *Tawarikh-i-Punjab* that Shah Mian Mir came to Amritsar at the request of Guru Arjan Dev and he with his own blessed hands put four bricks, one on each side and another in the middle of the tank. This ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone is also recorded in *The Punjab Notes and Queries*, Vol. I, p.141. According to the Sikh records, the foundation-stone was laid by Guru Arjan

Dev himself. The foundation that was laid originally was very solid. It was laid on a higher level than the bottom of the tank. A bridge connecting the foundation of Har Mandir with the entrance gate (*Darshani Deorhi*) was constructed over the props of aqueducts (*Surang Dwaries*) and arches (*mehrabas*). *Construction of Harmandir* : In the traditional Hindu temple architecture, buildings of the temples were built on a higher level, but in the case of Har Mandir, it was built on a level lower than the surrounding ground. The devotees who come to visit the temple have to go down the steps in order to pay obeisance at the sacred temple. This denotes the utmost humility of the Sikh devotees who love to lie in the state of prostration at the feet of the Lord and in the service of humanity. The Lord being Omnipresent and His created humanity living, in all the four directions, the Har Mandir was kept open from all the sides, Every one is free to enter the Golden Temple from any direction, This has been another distinguishing feature of the Sikh Temple. The plan of the construction of Har Mandir was excuted by Guru Arjan Dev himself assisted by a council of elderly devout Sikhs including Baba Buddha and Bhai Gurdas. Bhai Bahlo was an expert in brick-making, therefore he was entrusted with that task. Bhai Salo, Bhai Bhagtu, Bhai Kalyana and Bhai Paira were asked to arrange the building materials. Thus a magnificent structure was raised, with its matchless design and beauty. There came into being a great place of pilgrimage for the Sikhs. In the life-time of Guru Arjan Dev, Ramdaspur (Amritsar) grew into a flourishing town. Members of over fifty caste-groups came to settle here from Patti, Kasur and Kalanaur. A market known till to~day as Guru ka Bazar was established. A good number of bankers and traders became the residents of the town, which became a great trade-centre. The adventurous Sikhs were even sent to Turkistan to purchase horses there and sell them in India.

*The preparation of the Sikh Scripture:* The compilation of the *Adi Granth* began, when Guru Nanak Dev, during his travels had his note-book called "*Pothi*", A mention of the *Pothi* has been made in *Puratan Janamsakhi*. This *Pothi* was passed on to the second Guru, Guru Angad Dev, when the Guruship was bestowed on him. We cannot say with certainty the names of the saints, whose verses were included in it, because it could not be preserved. During his travels, Guru Nanak Dev might have collected the hymns of Kabir and Ravidas in Uttar Pradesh, of Jaidev in Bengal, of Namdev and

Trilochan in Maharashtra and of Sheikh Farid in Punjab. It seems likely on the basis of the *Pothis* of Baba Mohan, one of whose source of compilation must have been the *Pothi* of Guru Nanak Dev, Which must have been received by Guru Amar Das, the third Guru from the second Guru. We find mention of the four *Pothis* of Baba Mohan, two of which have been preserved and the other two have been lost. Baba Mohan, the son of Guru Amar Das was in the possession of these *Pothis* when the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, compiled *Granth Sahib*. The Guru went himself to take these *Pothis*, which were ultimately handed over to him, though hesitantly. These manuscripts were prepared earlier under the personal supervision of Guru Amar Das, by his grandson Sahansar Ram. One of the available manuscripts is at Patiala and the other at Ahiyapur, district Hoshiarpur. The first manuscript consists of 300 leaves and the second 224. Every leaf contains thirteen lines and every line about thirteen words. The first manuscript begins with Suhi Raga and the second with Ramkali Raga. Both the manuscripts together contain hymns in fifteen Ragas. At the end of each Raga, the *bani* of the saints is given. It seems evident that the *bani* of other Ragas had been included in the other two manuscripts, which have been lost. Gyani Gyan Singh, the author of *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, according to his statement, had seen one of these manuscripts beginning with Sri Raga.

The compilation of the *bani* of Guru Nanak Dev and the like-minded saints was a Herculean task. The *bani* of Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amar Das and Guru Ramdas had been preserved in the house of the Guru, but the *bani* of Guru Nanak Dev lay scattered far and wide because of the extensive travels of the Guru. A *Hukarnama* (an order) of the fifth Guru was circulated to all the Sikh centres, both inside and outside the country, for the collection of the *bani* of Guru Nanak Dev, The Sikh *Sangats* of far and near, complying with the orders of the fifth Guru, sent the compositions of Guru Nanak Dev preserved by them. Guru Nanak Dev and his successors had composed their verses under the name "Nanak". In order to differentiate the verses of each Guru the serial number of Guruship was mentioned with them adding the word *Mahla*. Since the religion of Guru Nanak Dev was spreading far and wide, the hymns of the Gurus were becoming popular day by day. There were several others in those days, who were passing on their verses under the name

“Nanak”, therefore it was a huge task to separate the real verses from the false ones. Since the hymns under the name “Nanak” were increasing with time, the Sikhs requested Guru Arjan Dev to select the genuine verses from them. It was very difficult for them to discriminate between the genuine and the false verses. It was in this context that the idea of *Granth Sahib* originated. In this way, he preserved the poetry of his predecessors and other saint-poets for posterity.

It is said that the elder brother of Guru Arjan Dev, Prithi Chand by name, had also been trying to compose and get composed hymns and pass them on as those of Guru Nanak Dev and other Gurus. In this way he wanted to be recognised as the Guru. According to Kesar Singh Chhibbar, as recorded in his *Bansavali Nama*, “Meharvan the son of Prithia (Prithi Chand) used to compose poetry. He studied Persian, Hindvi, Sahaskrit and Gurmukhi. He composed a lot of poetry, putting the name “Nanak” at the end of his poems. The *Dooms* (minstrels) began to sing the hymns of *Meenas* (Prithi Chand and his followers). They created another Guruship. These *Meenas* got prepared a *Granth* (holy book) and interspersed the hymns of the first four Gurus. The *Purohits* and Brahmins took sides, some to this side and some to that. Those who went to the other side were inimical to those belonging to this side. Those who came to this side left their (that of the other side) court... Here the Sikh *Rababis* were employed for Kirtan (congregational singing). Some Sikh recited here a hymn composed by Meharvan, which was heard by Guru Arjan Dev. He said to Bhai Gurdas: “The hymns of the Gurus must be separated. The *Meenas* are going to mix up hymns, which should be set in order.”

Bhai Gurdas was the scribe, who wrote *Granth Sahib* in Gurmukhi script, which was one of the prevalent scripts in Punjab in those days. Guru Arjan Dev collected all the material for *Granth Sahib*, which came from several sources. The bards had left their panegyrics with the Gurus, whom they had met in their lives. The hymns of Guru Nanak Dev had been collected from far and near. The hymns of the succeeding Gurus had been there in the house of the Guru. The hymns of the like-minded saints had been collected from their followers, though some of the hymns had been included in the *Pothis* of Guru Nanak Dev and Baba Mohan. The saints had been travelling extensively within the length and breadth of India. The Maharashtrian saint Namdev is said to have visited Punjab during his lifetime. There is a shrine in his name at village Ghuman of Gurdaspur district. Several other saints like Kabir, Ravidas and



others. had been intimately known to the people of Punjab through their devotees and popular hymns. The popularity of the saints like Namdev, Kabir, Ravidas, Sain and Trilochan can be well imagined through the verses of the third, fourth and fifth Sikh Gurus.

After compiling the material from different sources for *Granth Sahib*, Guru Arjan Dev started the work of editing the great scripture within the bounds of Ramsar, Amritsar. The compilation work had been finished in AD. 1601 and for the next three years, the work of editing was done and completed in AD. 1604. The scribe of the first edited recension was Bhai Gurdas, the great Sikh savant and poet. The very first consideration for the inclusion of the hymns of various saints for the new anthology was the ideology of Guru Nanak Dev. Another criterion besides the ideology was that of the musical modes.

*Installation of the Sikh scripture in Harmandir :* After the completion of the holy temple, the next remarkable development was the compilation and editing of *Granth Sahib*, the Sikh scripture. As recorded by M.A. Macauliffe in "The Sikh Religion", Guru Arjan, Dev invited all his Sikhs to see the precious compilation, the fruit of so much anxious labour, and distributed sacred food amongst them as a thanks - giving for the completion of the scripture. The volume was by the advice of Baba Buddha and Bhai Gurdas placed in the Har Mandir. At the conclusion of his task, the Guru told his Sikhs that the *Granth Sahib* was the embodiment of the Gurus, and should, therefore, be held in extreme reverence. Baba Buddha was made the first *Granthi* (high-priest) of Har Mandir. *Granth Sahib* was installed in the centre of the shrine, in order to spread its divine message in all directions. The Guruship was later bestowed on *Granth Sahib* or the *Adi Granth* (the First Book) by the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, in AD. 1708.

*The growing influence of the Sikh Movement:* Guru Arjan Dev was a great organiser. Because of the above mentioned two projects, firstly, the shrine of Golden Temple and secondly, the *Granth Sahib*, the scripture, the number of Sikhs increased immensely in Punjab. They attracted many Sikhs from far and near. The *masands* appointed by the Guru for the collection of Guru's dues came on Baisakhi day every year with a good number of Sikhs. The universal message of the new religion brought many new converts, not only from the Hindu fold but from Muslims also. This fact has been recorded by Emperor Jahangir in his *Tuzuk*, where he says: "So many of the simple-minded Hindus, nay,

many foolish Muslims too, had been fascinated by his (Guru's) ways and teachings. He was noised about as religious and worldly leader. They called him Guru, and from all directions crowds of fools would come to him and express great devotion to him. This busy traffic had been carried on for three or four generations. For years the thought had been presenting itself to my mind that either I should put an end to this false traffic, or he should be brought into the fold of Islam." Guru Arjan was peace-loving and totally imbued with the Name of the Lord, having his mace of humility and double-edged sword of modesty. Frederic Pincott says: "Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, was an active and ambitious man. He laid aside the dress of a faqir, which had been worn by all his predecessors, and converted the voluntary offerings of his disciples into a tax. This raised him to some importance, and enabled him to take men into his pay, a proceeding which conferred additional dignity upon him, and at the same time, intensified the jealousy of his Muhammedan neighbours." A. Barth, the author of *The Religions of India* says, "He (the Guru) was the first to surround himself with the paraphernalia of royalty, and he took advantage of his power to play a political part." All this is a misrepresentation, because Guru was called Sacha Patshah (True Emperor) by the Sikhs.

*The guru as first martyr of Sikhism* : After the death of Akbar the Great, Jehangir ascended the throne of Delhi. He came under the impact of Mujaddid Alf-i-Sani Sirhindi, who was a staunch adversary of the growing Sikh Movement. This Naqshbandi saint and the minister Chandu Shah, who had a grudge against the Guru for not accepting the hand of his daughter for his son, poisoned the ears of the Emperor. The Emperor's son Khusrau revolted against him and while fleeing came to the Guru. The Guru seeing his plight took compassion on him. This incident gave an excuse to the Emperor 'to put an end to the false traffic' within a few months of his accession. He states in his autobiography: "The idea struck me several times to make the Guru a convert to Islam, till at last Khusrau crossed the Beas and proceeded in the direction of the Guru... No sooner did I hear of this than, convinced as I was of the absurdity of the notion, I ordered the Guru to be brought into my presence. All his private property was confiscated to the State, and he himself placed in rigorous confinement." "The Guru was subjected to all sorts of tortures. His blistered body, when taken for a bath, disappeared in the cold waters of the river Ravi. According

to Bhai Gurdas, the Guru bore all this agony with great equanimity, during the night (previous to his martyrdom) having been deeply absorbed in the Name of the Lord, just like a deer engrossed in the sound of the horn (Var 24, Pauri 23). The Guru had totally resigned himself to the Will of the Lord, thus subjecting himself to the discipline enunciated by Guru Nanak Dev. The martyrdom of the Guru has been described in *Dabistan* in the following way: "Khusrau having been taken, the king ordered the imprisonment of Arjun-mu'll, and wanted to extort a large sum of money from him. The Guru was helpless; they kept him prisoner in the sandy country of Lahore until he died from the heat of the sun and illtreatment. This happened in 1606."

As a poet: Guru Arjan Dev was the most prolific Guru-poet after Guru Nanak Dev, whose religious philosophy he has faithfully recorded and elaborated. In *Guru Granth Sahib*, the compositions of which he compiled and edited with great care, diligence and scrutiny, his own contribution is the largest. Out of thirty-one Ragas, in the scripture, he composed his bani in thirty Ragas, the thirty-first having been added later by Guru Gobind Singh in the recension of Damdama. He also composed Swayyas. Besides his six Vars, his other significant longer poems are *Sukhmani*, *Bawan Akhri* and *Baramaha*. *Sukhmani* may be called a modern Upanishad like the *Japuji* of Guru Nanak Dev. Whereas the *Japuji* of Guru Nanak Dev is aphoristic, the *Sukhmani* of Guru Arjan Dev is expositional. It consists of 24 cantos (*ashtapadis*). Each canto contains one *shloka* and one *ashtapadi* (a composition of eight stanzas). According to the Guru, peace is obtained by drinking deep the Nectar of the Name of the Lord, Who is both Transcendent and Immanent. Before the creation of the world, he was in abstract meditation. But when it is His Will. He Creates the world of diverse forms and colours. God is Truth, therefore His Creation cannot be illusion. It is relatively real, though it is a changing phenomenon. Everything that takes birth is prone to die. The soul (*Atman*) is subservient to the Will of God. The Lord is Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient, but the soul has no power of its own; it denves all its power by the Grace of God and works in diverse fields. God Himself is the Primal Guru. He is Generous and Kind. He is Unfathomable, Impenetrable, Inexpressible and All-Pervasive. The endlessness of the created cosmos and the variety of the forms of species have been mentioned in the tenth canto. The eleventh canto relates the limitations of the individual

self.

The seductive power of the organs of perception and action has been clearly brought out in the fifth canto. The ears listen to the calumny of others. The eyes are attracted towards the beauty of other women. The tongue tastes the prohibited food and also utters vicious words. The feet lead towards vicious actions. The purity does not come without truth, which is the highest of all the virtues. The truthful person is a real saint. His tongue never touches falsehood. His eyes never wander after the beauty of other women. His ears never listen to the calumny of others. He considers himself lowliest of the lowly. He forsakes all the five vices and has full control over his senses. But such persons are very rare in this world. We find the mention of such a saint in a first stanza of the ninth canto.

In *Sukhmani*, humility has been assigned a very high position among the virtues, as ego among vices. The twelfth canto employs the figurative method for their description. The knower of Brahman (Brahm-Gian) is the store-house of all the virtues. A glimpse of this can be found in the eighth canto. The love of *maya* is like the love of the shade of the tree. Nothing can be achieved from it. The five vices are lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego. The five virtues corresponding to them are self-restraint, tolerance, contentment, devotion to duty and modesty. The Pathway to God can only be traversed by those, who imbibe virtues and godly qualities. This path is the path of *Bhakti* (love). *Sukhmani* lays emphasis on devotion through love. All formalism and ritualism have been decried. The wisdom of the world leads us nowhere. One can obtain release from the net of *maya* and noose of attachment with the help of the Name of the Lord. The Name or Word is obtained from the True Guru (Satguru). By the remembrance of the Name, the seeker becomes one with the Lord, but the meditation on the Name can only be done most effectively in the company of the saints (*Sadh Sangat*). For *Bhakti*, the Grace of the Lord is a pre-requisite. Therefore, it is the duty of the seeker to surrender completely before the Guru and the Lord. By the Grace of the Lord, one meets the True Guru and by the Grace of the True Guru one meets the Lord.

Though Guru Arjan Dev did not travel extensively like Guru Nanak Dev, we still find the use of several languages and dialects in his *bani*. The reason for this appears to be his intensive study of various scriptures and his meetings with the votaries of various

religions and religious sects. The study of Indian scriptures gave him an insight into the Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhramshas. He discarded the use of purely Sanskrit diction and preferred to use Prakrit and Apabhramsha formations, while addressing the pundits and Brahmins in *Sahaskriti*, a variation of the folk-language. This was done only for the satisfaction of the learned people, who did not want to talk in vernaculars. The Guru belonged to the central Punjab (Majha), but his Sikhs had spread far and wide. The saints and hermits used to visit him from far off places. Therefore, the use of the common religious terminology was natural. The Guru used this common diction or the saint-language (*Sant-Bhasha*) in several of his compositions. He also used the standard Punjabi as well as various Punjabi dialects in his hymns. The specialty of *Jaisri ke Var* is the use of three languages/dialects in one composition. The *Pauri* is composed in *Eastern Punjabi* and the two *shalokas* preceding it are composed in *Sahaskriti* and *Lahndi* respectively.

In *Maru Ki Var*, the Guru has made use of *Sindhi*, the language of the southern areas of Punjab.

Like Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Arjan Dev is against all sorts of social divisions and multifarious garbs. All the human beings are the children of the same father. The real objective of the precious human life is love for the Lord and the attainment of the union with Him through self-surrender and whole-hearted devotion. All the ritualism, formalism and symbolism are useless. The vices like lust, anger, greed, attachment, ego, calumny, duality, etc. must be curbed, and instead, the virtues like truth, contentment, mercy, righteousness, modesty, tolerance, etc. must be imbibed. The whole world can be conquered with the mace of modesty and the double-edged sword of humility. The Name of the Lord is the panacea of all ills. "I HAVE BEFRIENDED ALL" was the MOTTO of his life.

## 11

## THE DOCTRINE OF 'MEERI-PEERI'

JAGJIT SINGH

'Meeri-Peeri' as the term itself implies, signifies in essence the blending of worldly sovereignty and spiritual sovereignty. It is such a rare phenomenon in Indian history, and is so much at variance with the current notions surrounding spiritualism vis-a-vis political power, that many a scholar fails to entertain the idea that the acquisition of political power for even a noble cause can at all be a legitimate spiritual pursuit. In fact, some of the scholars are so much pre-occupied with this obsession that they have gone to the extent of ignoring or twisting valid facts of Sikh history in order to fit them into their interpretation of it, corresponding to their presumed approach.

1. *Guru Arjan's martyrdom not the first or the sole cause*

One such distortion of Sikh history is the hypothesis that the Sikh movement was a purely religious movement before it took a political turn with the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev. This hypothesis is factually incorrect. The concepts of '*Sacha Patshah*' and '*Meeri-Peeri*' mean virtually the same thing, i.e. the marriage of spiritual authority and worldly authority; and the ideal of '*Sacha-Patshah*' came to be associated with Guru Nanak himself<sup>1</sup> and the successor Gurus<sup>2</sup> at a very early date. Mohsin Fani writes: '*Sikhan Guru ha ra Sacha Padshah yani Badshah-i-haqiqat midanand*..<sup>3</sup> And the ideal of Sacha Patshah did not remain a harmless epithet or an airy ideal in the Sikh movement. It was institutionalized and had political ramifications. Guru Arjan used to hold assemblies which gave them the look of royal Darbars (Court);<sup>4</sup> and henceforth the Guru was looked upon by his followers as a worldly lord and a ruling sovereign.<sup>5</sup> In fact, "The Sikhs had already become accustomed to a form of self government within the Empire".<sup>6</sup>

The significant point is that the ideal of '*Sacha Patshah*' was not set up casually. That it was meant to be a deliberate challenge

to the ruling authority is clear from the manner the Gurus stuck to it despite the serious consequences it invited. One of the reasons of Guru Arjan's martyrdom was Jahangir's charge that the Guru "noised himself as a worldly leader."<sup>7</sup> Ram Lal incited Emperor Aurangzeb with his allegation that Guru Teg Bahadur boasted of *Badshahi-Karamat*, i.e. kingship and miracle.<sup>8</sup> Khushwaqt Rai states that some of the Sikhs, apparently dazzled by the brilliance of the Guru's *darbar*, were prompted to lay claims to sovereignty.<sup>9</sup> According to *Risala-i-Nanakshah*, Aurangzeb did enquire of Guru Teg Bahadur: Why People address you as *Sacha Patshah*?<sup>10</sup> Instead of trying to assuage the Emperor's suspicions, the Guru replied that whatever it was, it reflected the Will of the Almighty, and the faqir was not concerned with the fame or defame it brought.<sup>11</sup> Irvine writes: "One of this Guru's (Guru Teg Bahadur's) crimes, in the Emperor's eyes, may have been the style of address adopted by his disciples, who had begun to call their leader *Sacha Padshah* or the 'True King'. This title was readily capable of two-fold interpretation: it might be applied as the occasion served in a spiritual or a literal sense. Its use was extremely likely to provoke the mistrust of a ruler even less suspicious by nature than the Alamgir".<sup>12</sup>

Above all, we have the direct evidence of Jahangir, as cited above, that Guru Arjan "noised himself as a worldly leader", and the contemporary evidence of Dabistan that the Sikh polity in his time 'became a state within a state'.<sup>13</sup> Toynbee endorses the same fact that the predecessors of Guru Hargobind had already transformed the Sikh community "from an embryonic church into an embryonic state".<sup>14</sup> "There seems to have been an intermediate stage in the evolution of the Sikh military machine out of the Sikh religious fraternity which had been founded by Nanak about a hundred years before Hargobind's time. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century of the Christian Era the Sikh community seems to have assumed a form which was already political though it was not yet warlike".<sup>15</sup> And we have the glaring fact that Guru Arjan blessed Khusrav, the rebellious prince who contested the throne against Jahangir, and helped him with money. Not only money was given but the Guru also applied *Tilak* on his forehead as a token of blessing him for success in his enterprise of rebellion. This was direct political involvement by the Guru and the significance of all this was not lost upon Jahangir, who wrote: "He (Guru Arjan) discussed several matters with him (Khusrav) and made on his

forehead a finger-mark in saffron, which in terms of Hindus is called *Qashqa* and is considered propitious".<sup>16</sup> A European contemporary of this event draws the same inference: "The Guru congratulated him (Khusrau) for assuming sovereignty and applied three marks on his forehead. Although the Guru was a heathen, and the prince a Mussalman, yet he was glad in putting on the prince's forehead that pagan sign as a mark of good success in his enterprise ..." <sup>17</sup> And this was one of the charges which Jahangir levelled against Guru Arjan. It was not Guru Arjan's martyrdom which gave a political turn to the Sikh movement; rather it was the political aspect of the movement which contributed to his martyrdom.

## 2. *The Second Major Misinterpretation*

Another major misinterpretation being projected by some scholars is that Guru Hargobind, by taking up arms, deviated from the path of 'Nam or Nam Marg' followed by the earlier Gurus. Deviation from which view of *Nam*?

'*Nam*' is essentially an internal spiritual experience which cannot be communicated to others through words. "Says Kabir, a dumb person, on tasting sweet, is unable to convey his experience to others".<sup>18</sup> Hence, this experience can be visualized intellectually, if at all, only inadequately. Secondly, whereas there is a clear demarcation between religions which reject the world totally and which do not, there are; variations, about the religious goals and the associated practical conduct, within the orbit of what Max Weber calls 'inner-wordly asceticism'. "As we have already stated at a number of points, the specific character of the certification of salvation and of the associated practical conduct is completely different in religions which differently represent the character of the promised salvation, the promise of which ensures blessedness".<sup>19</sup>

To come to the specific case of *Nam Marg*, besides the Sikh Gurus, Nam Dev, Kabir, Ravi Das, Tirlochan, Sadna and some of the other Radical Bhaktas claim in their hymns to be votaries of Nam, and they are believed by their followers to have experienced Nam in their own lives. But, there is a clear difference between the approaches of the Sikh Gurus, on the one hand, and those of the Bhaktas named above, on the other, towards the vital issues of *Ahimsa* and the socio-religious status of women.<sup>20</sup> Again, within the circle of these Radical Bhaktas itself, none other condemns the caste so unequivocally as do Nam Dev and Kabir. In other words,



these reputed standard-bearers of *Bhakti Marg* react differently towards issues which are socially vital and have far-reaching historical consequences. Hence, there is no common criterion for knowing, much less for asserting, what is compatible and what is not compatible with the experience of Nam in its social and historical manifestations, excepting, perhaps, that these votaries of *Nam* supported in broad outline humanitarian values and goals. Guru Hargobind explained to the Maharashtrian saint Ram Das that he was internally an 'ascetic'.<sup>21</sup> Yet, some scholars presume to know better than him that the taking up of arms, even for a noble cause, was not accordant with *Nam Marg*. Guru Nanak condemned the rulers and the administration of his times for their oppression of the *ryot*, and was pained to see the suffering caused by Babar's invasion. The Sikh Panth became virtually 'a state within a state', atleast by Guru Arjan's time. And Guru Hargobind took up arms to defend that 'embryonic state'. Where do such scholars draw the line as to what is in harmony with *Nam Marg* and what is not? And on what basis? Max Weber's thesis, from which we will give here some excerpts, might be of help in clarifying some of these issues.

### 3. Max Weber's thesis

(a) 'World-rejecting asceticism' and 'inner-worldly asceticism': "Concentration upon the actual pursuit of salvation may entail a formal withdrawal from the "world", from social and psychological ties with the family, from the possession of worldly goods, and from political, economic, artistic and erotic activities, in short from all creaturely interests. One with such an attitude may regard any participation in these affairs as an acceptance of the world, leading to alienation from God. This is "world rejecting asceticism" (*Waltlehnede Askese*).

On the other hand, "the unique concentration of human behaviour on activities leading to salvation may require the participation within the world (or more precisely: within the institutions of the world but in opposition to them) of the religious individual's idiosyncratically sacred religious mood and his qualifications as the elect instrument of God. This is "inner-worldly asceticism" (*inner-weltliche Askese*). In this case the world is presented to the religious virtuoso as his responsibility. He may have the obligation to transform the world in accordance with his ascetic ideals, in which case the ascetic will become a rational reformer or revolutionary on the basis of a theory of natural

rights.”<sup>22</sup>

(b) *As a tool of God* “Salvation may be viewed as the distinctive gift of active ethical behaviour performed in the awareness that God directs this behaviour, i.e., that the actor is an instrument of God. We shall designate this type of attitude toward salvation, which is characterized by a methodical procedure for achieving religious salvation, as “ascetic”. This designation is for our purpose here, and we do not in any way deny this term may be and has been used in another and wider sense”.<sup>23</sup>

“Nevertheless, the world as a creation of God, who comes to expression in it despite its creatureliness, provides the only medium through which one’s unique religious charisma may prove itself by means of rational ethical conduct, so that one may become and remain certain of one’s own state of grace:’

“Hence, as the field provided for this active certification, the order of the world in which the (inner-worldly) ascetic is situated becomes for him a vocation which he must fulfil rationally”.<sup>24</sup>

“In contrast to asceticism, contemplation is primarily the quest to achieve rest in God and in him alone. It entails inactivity, and in its most consistent form it entails the cessation of thought, the nemesis of everything that in any way reminds one of the world, and of course the absolute minimization of all outer and inner activity”.<sup>24A</sup>

“For the (inner-worldly) ascetic too, the perception of the divine through emotion and intellect is of central importance, only in his case it is of a “motor” type, so to speak. the ascetic’s assurance of grace is achieved when he is conscious that he has succeeded in becoming a tool of his God, through rationalized ethical action completely oriented to God. But for the contemplative mystic, who neither desires to be the God’s “instrument”, but desires only to become the God’s “vessel”, the ascetic’s ethical struggle, whether of a positive or a negative type, appears to be a perpetual externalization of the divine in the direction of some peripheral function. For this reason, ancient Buddhism recommended inaction as the precondition for the maintenance of the state of grace, and in any case Buddhism enjoined the avoidance of every type of rational, purposive activity, which it regarded as the most dangerous form of secularization. On the other hand, the contemplation of the mystic appears to the (inner-worldly) mystic as indolent, religiously sterile, and ascetically reprehensible self-indulgence - a wallowing in self-created

emotions prompted by the deification of the creaturely” <sup>25</sup>

“For the Buddhist monk, agriculture is the most reprehensible of all occupations ..... Yet the alms he collects consist principally of agricultural products” <sup>26</sup>

In any case, the typical mystic is never a man of conspicuous social activity, nor is he at all prone to accomplish any rational transformation of the mundane order on the basis of a methodical pattern of life directed toward external success” . <sup>27</sup>

(c) *Social and Historical Implications* “The decisive historical difference between the predominantly oriental and Asiatic types of salvation religions and those found primarily in the accident is that the former usually culminate in contemplation and the latter in (inner-worldly) asceticism” <sup>28</sup>

“Moreover, only in the accident was the additional step taken - by ascetic Protestantism - of translating rational asceticism into the life of world. The inner-worldly order of dervishes in Islam cultivated a planned procedure for achieving salvation, but this procedure, for all its variations, was oriented ultimately to the’ mystical quest for salvation of the Sufis... The asceticism of the dervishes is not, like that of (inner-worldly) ascetic Protestants, a religious ethic of vocation, for the religious actions of the dervishes have very little relationships to their secular occupations, and in their scheme secular vocations have at best a purely external relationship to the planned procedure of salvation.” <sup>29</sup>

“But an unbroken unity integrating in systematic fashion an ethic of vocation in the world with assurance of religious salvation was the unique creation of ascetic Protestantism alone. Furthermore, only in the Protestant ethic of vocation does the world, despite all its creaturely imperfections, possess unique and religious significance as the object through which one fulfils his duties by rational behaviour according to the will of an absolutely transcendental God. When success crowns rational, sober purposive behaviour of the sort not oriented exclusively to worldly acquisition, such success is construed as a sign that God’s blessing rests upon such behaviour. This inner-worldly asceticism had a number of distinctive consequences not found in any other religion. This religion demanded of the believer, not celibacy, as in the case of the monk, but the avoidance of all erotic pleasure; not poverty, but the elimination of all idle and exploitive enjoyment of unearned wealth and income, and the avoidance of all feudalistic, sensuous ostentation of wealth; not the ascetic death-in-life of the

cloister, but an alert, rationally controlled patterning of life, and the avoidance of all surrender to the beauty of the world, to art, or to one's own moods and emotions. The clear and uniform goal of this asceticism was the disciplining and methodical organization of the whole pattern of life. Its typical representative was the "man of vocation", and its unique result was the rational organization and institutionalization of social relationships." <sup>30</sup>

"To Max Weber the exemplar among such religious movements that 'change the world' was Puritan... none in his opinion had influenced in such a revolutionary manner as had Puritanical religiosity." <sup>31</sup>

#### 4. *The Sikh View of 'Nam,* <sup>32</sup>

We cannot presume to delineate 'Nam' in its entirety. "Nam sustains the whole animal life" (*'Nam ke dhare sagle jant'*);... "Nam sustains the entire creation" (*'Nam ke dhare saga I akar'*). <sup>33</sup> We restrict ourselves here, for a particular purpose, to only those aspects of Nam, which are related to the main points covered by the excerpts given in the earlier section, and which are amply vouchsafed by the hymns of the Gurus and their life-accounts.

(a) *Not World-rejecting* <sup>34</sup> For the Gurus, the world is true and not a thing to be rejected or to be escaped from.

"True are thy worlds and thy universes,  
true are the forms Thou createst." <sup>35</sup>

"True is He; True is His creation. .," <sup>36</sup>

"Deride not the world, as it is the creation of God." <sup>37</sup>

The Gurus have explicitly condemned all ascetic or escapist practices. "One reaches not Truth by remaining motionless like trees and stones, nor by being sawn alive." <sup>38</sup> "yogi, you are sitting in a trance, but you discriminate and have a sense of duality. You beg from door to door, are you not ashamed of it?, <sup>39</sup> "Jainic asceticism, or even if the body were cut into bits, would not efface the dirt of ego." <sup>40</sup>

All the Sikh Gurus, excepting the eighth, who passed away at an early age, were married house-holders, and the third Guru issued an injunction that no recluse or ascetic could be a Sikh. <sup>41</sup>

(b) *As a Tool of God* "To abide by God's Will' is the *summum bonum* of Sikhism, as this is the ultimate goal to which all spiritual or religious aspirations and strivings must converge. Mukti and heaven (in the traditional sense) is not the Sikh ideal. "One who is fond of seeing God, what has he to do with Mukti or heaven? (*Dar dainshan ka pritam hove mukat baikunthe kare kia*),," <sup>42</sup> After negating

certain current paths followed for attaining salvation, Guru Nanak clinches the issue, by first posing the question: "How to become True, and how to tear the veil of falsehood?"; and then by answering it: "By abiding by (God's) Will'.<sup>43</sup> In fact, 'Moving by God's Will' is so central to Sikhism that this theme is emphasized again and again in Guru Granth Sahib. Secondly, no methodology has in it an in-built compulsive force to achieve salvation in its own right. It all depends on God's Grace. The very opening line of Guru Granth Sahib, enumerating the attributes of God, ends with the stipulation that He is attained through '*Gur-parsad*' (Le. Guru's or God's Grace). Guru Arjan, in one of his hymns, gives a long list of methods for God-realization (including ascetic practices of yoga) tried and found wanting: "I tried many methods of meeting God and failed. Frustrated, I surrendered myself to God and begged to be granted enlightenment"<sup>44</sup> "Nam, the immaculate, is unfathomable, how can it be known? Nam is within us, how to get to it The perfect Guru awakens your heart to the vision of God. It is by the Grace of God that one meets Guru.',<sup>45</sup> "By His Grace alone is He ever remembered (*Simrya Jui*). " And to become a tool of God' is the way to earn God's Grace and '*Nam*'. "Service in the world leads to approval in the Court of God.,,<sup>46</sup> "He who serves God gets bliss and is absorbed in *Nam*, without straining himself (*sehja*). "<sup>47</sup>

The Sikh Gurus conceive of God as a God of Will, who is creative and whose Will is operative in the world with a direction and purpose. For man, therefore, the ideal is to carry out His Will by doing creative activity in the universe as God's instrument. The ideal is not blissful union as an end in itself, but union with a view to knowing His Will and carrying it out. Accordingly, to be linked to Nam means 'to become God's instrument' and to share the responsibility of a creative and virtuous development in the world.'<sup>48</sup> "May I have millions of hands to serve Thee. Service is the way to cross the hurdles of life.'. "<sup>49</sup> "Serve God every moment and relax not."<sup>50</sup>

Janam-sakhis (life-accounts of Guru Nanak) record that Guru Nanak received a two-fold prophetic mandate from God at the moment of his enlightenment to propagate *Nam* (*Nam japaona*) and to establish a new Panth.<sup>51</sup> In other words, in Guru Nanak's mission, *Nam Marg* was inextricably joined to sharing responsibility of a creative and virtuous development in the world. Again, when Guru Nanak found Guru Angad wholly absorbed in meditation,

he (Guru Nanak) reminded the latter to become engaged in carrying out the mission of organising the Panth., which he had been entrusted with.<sup>52</sup> This does not mean pitting Nam Marg (or spiritual bliss) versus god-oriented worldly responsibility, or excluding one at the cost of the other. What it means is combining the two for the purpose of transforming the world in accordance with God's purpose.

(c) *Social and Historical Implications* Without going into all the social and historical developments of the Sikh movement, we need only to point to two of these here. H.H. Risley in his book, *The People of India*, likens, though in an exaggerated, graphic style, the breaking of caste-barriers to the overcoming of the gravitational force. Of all the votaries of the Bhakti Marg, only the Sikh movement succeeded in establishing the egalitarian Sikh Panth as a separate, distinct entity outside the caste society by overcoming such a tough negative force. This indicates the seriousness and tenacity of purpose for bringing about social equality generated by the distinctive Sikh view of Nam Marg.

Another indication is that 'the lowest of low in Indian estimation' shared political power under Banda,<sup>53</sup> and none higher than the Jats (on the border-line of Vaisyas and Sudras). Carpenters (Sudras), and Kalals (lower than the Sudra) shared political power in the Missal period.<sup>54</sup> This compares favourably even with most of the modern revolutions, for Brinton writes: "None of these (English, American and French) revolutions quite substituted a brand-new ruling class for the old one" at least not unless one thinks of class without bothering about the human beings, who make up the class;..<sup>55</sup> Of course, other votaries of *Bhakti Marg* in India could not even conceive of bringing about such a political proletarian revolution as they were wedded to the doctrine of *Ahimsa*.

(d) *A parallel Development* One should not expect an exact parallelism between social and historical developments, especially between those separated by considerable time or space. What we want to emphasize, by putting the Sikh view of *Nam* in juxtaposition with the excerpts from Max Weber's thesis given in the previous section, is that 'to become God's instrument in carrying out His Will and purpose in this World' is a distinct religious ideal as well as a means of securing spiritual bliss or salvation. This ideal was shared by Protestant Christianity and Sikhism, and this led, in both cases, to far-reaching social and historical developments. However, there was one vital difference. Pacifism, non-violence

or Ahimsa came to be, somehow, integrally associated with Christianity; and, despite the Calvinist attempts to correct this one-sided tilt, it inhibited the complete fulfilment of the revolutionary potential of Christianity. Neither the Sikh doctrine, nor the movement inspired by it, had any such inhibitions.

### 5. *The Use of Force*

It is not to our purpose to enter into a discussion of theological and ethical issues in their heoretical abstractions, for there can be no end to hair-splitting. What is relevant for us is the stand of Sikhism on the issue of *Ahimsa*, as illustrated by the hymns of the Gurus and their lives.

“...prophetic revelation involves, for both the prophet and for his followers... a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated and meaningful attitude towards life. To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning. To this meaning the conduct of mankind must be oriented if it is to bring salvation, for only in relation to this meaning does life obtain a unified and significant pattern

Moreover, it always contains the important religious conception of the world as a cosmos which is challenged to produce somehow a “meaningful”, ordered totality, the particular manifestations of which are to be measured and evaluate according to this requirement.”<sup>56</sup>

Guru Nanak’s view about *Ahimsa*, as expressed in a long hymn,<sup>57</sup> can be appreciated in the perspective of this concept of the world as a meaningful totality. The Guru emphasizes in this hymn that the whole life process has a common source. No animal life is possible without the use of flesh in one form or the other. He points out the fallacy of those who make a fetish of the question of eating meat; but have no scruples in ‘devouring’ (exploiting) men. all distinctions between non-vegetarian foods being impure and the vegetarian being pure are arbitrary, because the source of life is the same elements. He chides the Pandit and the Sanyasis for their false notions. Guru Nanak himself cooked meat at Kurukshetra,<sup>58</sup> and meat was served in the Langer of Guru Angad and his successor Gurus.<sup>59</sup>

The prohibition against -non-vegetarian diet arose as a corollary of the doctrine of Ahimsa, which had two implications. First, the use of non-vegetarian diet or the use of force, was supposed to militate against the spiritual progress of a religious person. Secondly, it prohibited the person seeking Moksha from

entering the sodo-political field for the objective of undoing social, political or economic aggression, if necessary by the use of force. Guru Nanak's hymns, and the partaking of meat by the Gurus, completely repudiate the doctrine of Ahimsa and its socio-political implications. Because, "The universal mood of pity, extending to all creatures, cannot be the carrier of any rational behaviour and in fact leads away from it."<sup>60</sup> To stick to Ahimsa at all costs would have amounted to sacrificing the 'meaningful, ordered totality' of life at the alter of an arbitrarily formulated norm.

#### 6. *The Doctrine of Meeri-Peeri*

*Meeri* and *Peeri* are both essential and are entwined components of this doctrine.

(a) *Why Meeri is an essential component.* In the first place: "Every religiously grounded unworldly love and indeed every ethical religion must, in similar measure and for similar reasons, experience tensions with the sphere of political behaviour. This tension appears as soon as religion has progressed to anything like a status of equality with the sphere of political associations."<sup>61</sup> In other words, there is inherent conflict, at all levels, between ethical religions and political authority based on social, political, or economic stratification. The degree to which this conflict surfaces, or flares up, would depend upon the extent to which an ethical religion challenges a political status quo, or upon the measure by which the political authority compromises or yields to such a challenge.

Secondly, when a movement motivated by ethical religion seeks a revolutionary change in any of the systems of stratification, it does not limit itself to piecemeal reconstruction of an existing system. Entrenched systems of stratification might be amenable to reform, but would not surrender without an armed struggle when their very existence is at stake. And, as all systems get entrenched, in the last analysis, on the basis of political and military sanctions, religious and ethical movements seeking radical changes in the status quo, as the Sikh movement did, have to be political and militant. The political dimension of a revolution "figures both with respect to goals and to means. The goal of a revolution in fact may be a new political order, while political methods are unavoidable no matter what the stakes of revolution may be. This double importance of political power gives it some claim to be considered the most important factor, though not the exclusive factor involved."<sup>62</sup> "Subordinate relationships universally and for ever



pose a political problem. the issue of subordination is more pervasive than that of exploitation, to which Marx tried to limit it”<sup>63</sup> “The revolutionary process itself is in the first instance a struggle for political power. And whatever may be the deeper driving forces of a revolution, the struggle for the state always appears as the immediate content; indeed to such an extent that the transformation of the social order often appears not as the goal of the revolution, but simply as means used by revolutionaries to conquer or to exercise power.”<sup>64</sup> “Finally, our definition of revolution considers recourse to violence as essential rather than accidental to it. The magnitude and the abruptness of change involved in revolution always produces violence in some form.”<sup>65</sup>

Not only that. Even a radical social change in the status quo cannot be brought about, or maintained, without a corresponding political set-up. One of the important factors, why the votaries of the Bhakti Marg did not institutionalize their anti-caste ideology into a separate social identity outside the caste society, could be that they did not attempt to create a corresponding political order: Within the Sikh movement itself, it was because of political power that the Jats of the Sikh tract came to regard themselves as superior to the Rajputs’<sup>66</sup> *en masse* and permanently. The carpenters (Sudras) could raise their social status and transform themselves into Ramgarhias, and Kalals (lower than the Sudras) could become Ahluwalias, because they shared political power in the Missals. And the Rangretas, though given equal status in the Oal Khalsa,<sup>67</sup> could not retain it because they missed the bus in the race of acquiring political power in the Missal period.

(b) ‘*Peeri*’ : ‘*Peeri*’ is not merely an essential component of ‘Meeri-Peeri’, it is the fulcrum around which ‘Meeri’ must revolve. Because, in the Gurus’ concept of ‘Meeri-Peeri’, the exercise of Political power was valid only so long it was employed in transforming the world in accordance with God’s purpose. It ceased to be valid the moment it was used merely for its secular enjoyment by any agency, whether Khalsa or any other. The Akal takhat was meant not to be the seat of worldly political power, it was the throne of God only. Guru Hargobind, addressing his army on the eve of a battle, said: “Brother Sikhs, this contest is not for empire, for wealth, or for land. It is in reality a war for religion”<sup>68</sup> The creation of the Khalsa was just an extension of the doctrine of Meeri-Peeri”. Whereas Guru Gobind Singh had declared that he did not aspire for raj (political authority) for his own person,<sup>69</sup>

it was he who blessed the downtrodden Jats and Sudras) to attain *raj* at a time when his sons were alive. <sup>70</sup> “The Khalsa was God’s own, and its achievements were God’s achievements’ (‘Wahiguru jee ka Khalsa, Wahiguru ji kee fateh’). In the contemporary work of Sri Guru Sobha, it is made clear that “The Khalsa was created to destroy the evil-doer and to remove distress.” <sup>71</sup>

What is more important for consideration here is that, in the same work, *Nam* is made an integral part of the Khalsa discipline. “One should participate in Sangat (religious congregation) and sing God’s praise; the Khalsa prays for the gift of *Nam*.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, the obligation of the Khalsa to bear arms to serve God’s cause, and the obligation to link oneself to *Nam*, are both emphasized, in the Tankhahnama of Bhai Nand Lal (which contains the often-cited line “Raj Karega Khalsa”, Le. “The Khalsa shall rule”), side by side in the same stanza.

“Khalsa is one who overcomes the five evils;

.....  
Khalsa is one who gives up ego;

.....  
Khalsa is one who does not discriminate;

. . . . .  
Khalsa is one who protects the poor;

.....  
Khalsa is one who does *Nam simran*; Khalsa is  
one who fights the evil-doer;

.....  
Khalsa is one who links himself to ‘*Nam*’;

.....  
Khalsa is one who destroys the evil-doer” <sup>73</sup>

In other words, the obligations to bear arms and to link with ‘*Nam*’ were considered by the Khalsa to be complementary and not mutually exclusive. In fact, the Sikh doctrine regards ‘*Haumen*’ (ego) to be the root-cause of all evils, discriminations, stratifications, domination, aggression, etc; and’ the remedy it suggests is to substitute self-centredness by God-consciousness, which can be done only through the realization of ‘*Nam*’ by the Grace of God. <sup>74</sup>

### 7. Conclusion

There is no dichotomy either in the Sikh doctrine or in the movement inspired by it during the Guru period. Sikhism is not wedded to the doctrine or the norms of Ahinsa, as other *Bhagats* in

India were. The Sikh view of Nam embraces the totality of life, and it inspires participation in God-oriented worldly activity with a view to creating a “meaningful, ordered totality” in the world. Hence, the very premises of judging and interpreting the Sikh doctrine and the Sikh movement, from a narrow view or the norms of Ahinsa, are not valid; because, otherwise, it would amount to weighing the Sikh view of Nam and the movement it inspired in the scale of non-Sikh ideals and values.

## REFERENCES

- 1 Varan Bhai Gurdas, Var 24, Pauri iii
- 2 Macauliffe, Max Arthur: *The Sikh Religion*, Vol in, p.76
- 3 *Dabistan*
- 4 M. Gregor, W.L.: *The History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 1, p.54; Latif, Syed Mohammad: *History of the Punjab*, p.253
- 5 Latif, p.253
- 6 Dabistan; Gokai Chand Narang: *Transformation of Sikhism*, p.45
- 7 *Tuzuk-e-Jahangiri*, Trans. by Alexander Rogers, p.72
- 8 Bute Shah: *Tawarikh-i-Panjab*; Gurbax Singh, Punjab History conference, Feb. 1976, (Proceedings), p.70 pp.77-78
- 10 *Ibid.*, p.75
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Irvine, William: *Later Mughals*, p.79
- 13 Cited by Gokal Chand Narang: p.45
- 14 Toynbee, A.J., *A Study of History*, V, p.665
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Tuzuk-e, Jahangiri, Cited by Hari Ram Gupta: *History of the Sikh Gurus*, p.100
- 17 *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, edited Ganda Singh, p.184
- 18 *Guru Granth Sahib*, p.334
- 19 Max Weber: *The Sociology of Religion*, p.164
- 20 Daijeet Singh: *The Sikh Ideology*, Singh Brothers, Bazar Mai Sawan, Amritsar: pp.122, 123, 127, 128, 132-135, 141-143
- 21 *Dabistan*
- 22 Max Weber: *The Sociology of Religion*, p.166
- 23 *Ibid.*, p.164. As this is likely to cause confusion, we are adding within brackets, the word “inner-worldly” to the term “asceticism” used by Weber in his restricted sense, in order to distinguish it from world-rejecting or

contemplative asceticism

- 24 *Ibid.*, p.167
- 24a *Ibid.*, p.169
- 25 *Ibid.*, p.171
- 26 *Ibid.*, p.172
- 27 *Ibid.*, p.176
- 28 *Ibid.*, p.177
- 29 *Ibid.*, p.182
- 30 *Ibid.*, p.182-83
- 31 Mommsen (p.311) cited by S.N. Eisenstadt: *Sociology of Religion*, edited by Roland Robertson, p.305
- 32 Daljeet Singh: *Sikhism*, pp.186-87; *The Doctrine of Nam*, *Journal of Sikh Studies*, August, 1975
- 33 *Guru Granth Sahib*, p.284
- 34 Daljeet Singh: *Sikhism*, Chapter 15
- 35 *Guru Granth Sahib*, p.463
- 36 *Ibid.*, p.294
- 37 *Ibid.*, p.611
- 38 *Ibid.*, p.952
- 39 *Ibid.*, p.886
- 40 *Ibid.*, p.265
- 41 Daljeet Singh: *Sikhism*, p.270
- 42 *Guru Granth Sahib*, p.360
- 43 *Ibid.*, p.1.
- 44 *Ibid.*, pp.641-642
- 45 *Ibid.*, p.1242
- 46 *Ibid.*, p.26
- 47 *Ibid.*, p.11
- 48 Daljeet Singh: *Sikhism*, pp.215-216
- 49 *Guru Granth Sahib*, p.781
- 50 *Ibid.*, p.77
- 51 *Janam-Sakhi Meharban wali*, edited by Kirpal Singh, p.89
- 52 Sarup Das Bhalla: *Mehma Parkash*, Part One, p.326
- 53 Irvine: *J. A.S.B.*, Vol. 63 (1894), p.124
- 54 Prinsep, Henry T.: *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, p.24
- 55 Brinton, Crane: *The Anatomy of Revolution*, p.270
- 56 Max Weber: *The Sociology of Religion*, pp.58-59
- 57 *Guru Granth Sahib*, trans. by Gopal Singh, pp.1230-1231
- 58 *Janam-Sakhi, Balewali*, edited by Surinder Singh Kohli, p.277

- 59 Mehma Parkash, ii, pp.49,64,609
- 60 Max Weber: *The Sociology of Religion*, p.267
- 61 *Ibid.*, p.223
- 62 Hagopian, M.N.,: *The Phenomenon of Revolution*, p.3
- 63 Bernard de Jouvenal, cited by Jacques Ellul, B.: *Autopsy of Revolution*, p.108
- 64 Borkenon, F.: *Sociological Review*, 29 (1932), p.4165 Hagopian, MN.,: *Phenomenon of Revolution*, p.3
- 66 Ibbetson, Sir Denzil: *Punjab Castes*, Sec. 437
- 67 *The Sikh Revolution*, p.205; Bhangu Rattan Singh, *Prachin Panth Parkash*, pp.216, 469
- 68 Macauliffe, Vol. iv, p.255
- 69 Koer Singh: Gurbilas Patshahi Das, p.99
- 70 *Ibid.*, pp.131, 139
- 71 *Sri Gur Sobha*, edited by Ganda Singh, p.21
- 72 *Ibid.*, p.25
- 73 *Tankhahnama* of Bhai Nand Lal; *Rehtname*, compiled by Piara Singh Padam, p.59
- 74 Daljeet Singh: *Sikhism*, Chapters 16, 17

## 12

# CREATION OF THE KHALSA : A NON-SIKH INDIAN LITERARY PERSPECTIVE

HIMADRI BANERJEE

The history of the birth of the Khalsa has long been illuminating the Sikh creative mind over the centuries. Even the Sikh studies of the recent times do not fail to highlight this episode. Thus one modern scholar has portrayed this occasion as the 'central event' of Sikh history, because it stimulated 'a revolutionary change' in the minds of the gurus' followers. Again it is credited with 'sealing' the borders of Punjab to invaders and giving the Sikhs 'sovereignty' over the whole province. The Khalsa, according to another leading exponent of the Panthic philosophy of the post-independence decades, was committed to the 'task of founding a society' for maintaining 'the permanent and unalterable Dharma' 'affecting all aspects of human life' and 'totalitarian in its effects'.<sup>1</sup>

These seminal observations underlining the creation of the Khalsa are reported to have been questioned by some notable, dissenters' in India and abroad.<sup>2</sup> Again these have generated scholarly debates and introduced an additional dimension to Sikh studies of our times. Generally speaking, we are accustomed to listening to what is being debated amongst the leading experts in English. But we are not perhaps aware of how the twentieth century non-Sikh Indian mind has often tried to appreciate the Tenth Guru's creation of the Khalsa. A study of this literary harvest may provide a glimpse of the attitude of the non-Sikh authors of the Indian sub-continent towards the Panth.

For the convenience of our present discussion, we may refer to three monographs - one each written in Bengali, Hindi and Oriya - dealing with the life and message of Guru Gobind Singh, especially the fighting role of his Khalsa in the history of the Sikh

resistance movement against the Mughals. Incidentally, these monographs were brought out in the first half of the present century, when India's fight for national liberation was generating a new sense of self-consciousness and stimulated a search for the past heroic tradition of the sub-continent. These authors were no less affected by certain communal considerations of the period. Thus politics religion and literature were brought closer on a common platform centering around the story of creation of 'the Khalsa on the day of the Baisakhiin 1699.

## II

Tinkari Banerjee's (b. 1856) *Guru Gobinda Singha* seems to be one of the pioneering studies on the life of the Tenth Guru undertaken in any modern Indian language outside Punjab. <sup>3</sup> Banerjee was born and brought up in an orthodox Hindu Brahmin family and it had a deep imprint on his literary craft. The monograph was an incomplete one when it was first brought out in 1896. It was later on enlarged, revised and published in its present form in 1918. Based mainly on the *Suraj Prakash*, it was perhaps the most detailed biography of the Guru in Bengali and its author was not altogether unmindful of the works of the British authorities like Malcolm, Cunningham and Cave Brown. The biographer however regarded the *Suraj Prakash* as the most reliable source of information in this regard and generally depended on Bhai Santokh Singh's view whenever there was any difference of opinion among the authorities.

Banerjee claimed to have drafted the biography of the Guru in accordance with the Sikh religious belief and ethical tradition. A historian of the Sikhs, according to him, should first sincerely try to appreciate the basic tenets of the Panth before undertaking any task of reconstructing its religious institutions and historical tradition. With this end in view, he seems to have cultivated a closer relationship with the Bhai of the Barabazar Gu rdwara, Calcutta, who, on their turn helped him in communicating the significance of the writings of Bhai Santokh Singh.,

The biographer devoted a chapter (Chapter XVI) entitled the 'Pahul Sanskar' on the birth of the Khalsa. He had no doubt that the Khalsa's formal induction to militarism had a significance of Its own and this therefore requires more than his passing attention. He quoted the Guru's injunction that every Sikh should always bear arms and fight whenever he would be challenged by his enemy. While appreciating the growing demand for militarism in

the Panth, the biographer also reterred to the dignity involved in it and as a historian tried to find out its answer from the political sufferings and military harrasment encountered by the Sikhs in their daily life in Punjab. He went back to the martyrdom of the Ninth Guru and portrayed how his son and successor, Gobind Rai, had to fight out the grave situation arising out of it. The author emphasized that the young Guru had to negotiate the situation when his Sikhs were steadily encircled by their enemy. It put an immensse pressure on the resources of the Panth. The Guru's call to arms, according to him, was therefore an answer to the twin objective, namely, the protection of life and religion of the Sikhs within the political framework of Punjab. Banerjee tried to provide an answer to Guru's militarism in a historical setting which we generally miss in Rabindranath Tagore's early twentieth century writing on the Sikhs. Unlike Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Banerjee also tried to appreciate this issue from the perspective of a Sikh. <sup>4</sup>

Another significant point that had received the serious attention of Banerjee in his account of the birth of Khalsa is the relationship between the Guru and his Sikhs. While denying any place to the Massands, Minas, Dhirmalis, Ramrais, Kurimars and Narimars in his vision of the Khalsa, his disciples were particularly instructed not to have any truck with them. It necessitated a redefinition of his Sikhs. Banerjee thus argued that Sikhs should not only be brave, but they should always try to emulate the tradition of Guru Angad when he had been serving Guru Nanak as one of his disciples. Of all his disciples, Banerjeecontinues, Guru Angad (Lehna) alone passed the different ordeals with all grace. Deep veneration, unquestioned surrender, absolute faith and universal readiness to serve the Guru even at the risk of one's life, would be some of the essential distinguishing marks of a true Sikh. The *Panch Piyaras* with their five Ks were destined to perpetuate the tradition.

This perception of the Guru's Sikhs in the scheme of the Khalsa coupled with the total elimination of the dissenting sects, Banerjee sought to project as the ideal of surrender and service of the days of Guru Nanak. Thus the Guru's biographer drew our attention not only to a code of conduct that underlines that personal and organisational aspects of the life of a Sikh, but confirmed the presence of an uninterrupted historical tradition since the middle of the fifteenth century. It would be perhaps no exaggeration to point out that Banerjee's commitment to



Brahmanical ethos did not here affect his appreciation of some of the *rahit* as enshrined in the lives of the Gurus and perpetuated by his disciples. But Banerjee's craftmanship also bore a few unmistakable marks of his deep Sanatani commitment and he made no secret of it. Thus, his Guru Gobind Singh was no doubt a heavenly commissioned personality on earth; he was fighting for the deliverance of the Hindus against the Mughal tyranny. Again the Sikh messiah agreed to baptise his Sikhs only after he had received the blessings of Goddess Bhabani. This is symbolised by the gift of her sword for the success of his earthly mission. The biographer felt no hesitation in recording that one of the five Ks was the gift of mythical Hanuman to the Khalsa. Besides, his pronounced Hindu bias clouded his assessment of some of the major issues denounced by the Guru at the time of the creation of the Khalsa. The biographer's unequivocal assertion in the constructive role of Hindu caste system as well as his insistence on the continuance of worship of Hindu idols in the future scheme of work of the Khalsa underlined his sincere attempt to rehabilitate these two Brahmanical religious ingredients within his vision of the Khalsa. This sounds like an echo of the views of the contemporary Punjab Hindu Sabha leaders who were universally opposed to granting any separate communal status and Identity of the Sikhs from that of the Hindus. His depiction of the birth of the Khalsa was a confused patchwork of a few contradictory Hindu-Sikh religious beliefs and institutions and therefore suffers from an inherent dichotomy and contradiction. Incidentally, they also constitute some of the distinguishing marks of the leading non-Sikh authors of his generation writing on the Panth.

### III

Another important biographical contribution came from the pen of Beni Prasad (1897-1945).<sup>5</sup> A scion of a Lower middle class Vaishya Jain family of Agra, Prasad recounts the story of the birth of the Khalsa in his *Guru Gobind Singh*<sup>6</sup> in Hindi. It was published in the *Manoranjan Granthamala* series of the Nagri Pracharini Sabha, Benaras. Prior to it, he had briefly dealt with this problem in the *Saraswati* (Allahabad) at the threshold of the present century (October 1907).<sup>7</sup> Prasad was associated with the different English and Punjabi sources though he did not refer to them even in the footnotes of the biography of the Tenth Guru, perhaps anticipating the pattern of readership.

Generally speaking, he narrated the circumstances leading to the creation of the Khalsa in a popular readable style so that it could evoke a note of enthusiasm in the mind of his readers. He deliberately sought to highlight the element of drama in the biography and devoted a considerable amount of space and attention to the Guru's address and dialogue with his disciples which we generally miss in the volume of Banerjee. Further, as against Banerjee's restrained and serious literary style, Prasad was in full cry with his assertive but orthodox Hindu religious sentiment in his analysis of the birth of the Khalsa. He injected much of this sentiment in Guru's speech on the day of the Baisakhi and again on the following day, while he was talking to the Hindu Hill Rajas envisaging a united frontal attack on the Mughals. In the eyes of the Hindi biographer, the issues involved at the time of the creation of the Khalsa were equally clear and definite. He documented it as a bold attempt at restoring the lost Hindu glory of the days of the Vedas. Guru's disciples, Prasad claimed, were the direct descendants of the ancient Aryan heroes like Lord Krishna, Rama, Yudhisthira and Bhishma. Besides, the Hindus were the original sons of the soil, i.e., the Aryavarta, but they were subjected to numerous indignities like religious oppression, political enslavement and social sufferings at the hands of the alien Mughals. The biographer was therefore of the opinion that the Guru had conceived of the Khalsa for attaining the deliverance of the Hindus as well as the Indians from the clutches of the Mughal on slaughts. He deliberately added to this scheme of work a spirit of ancient Hindu racial superiority, perhaps as a counterblast to European racialism of his time.

Prasad's depiction of the circumstances leading to the birth of the Khalsa was generally meant to be an all Hindu affair: the Guru was a hero of the Hindus and fought exclusively for the Hindus. In this monograph, one would therefore often come across references about the Sikhs as an integral part of the Hindu society and Guru Gobind Singh as one of the chief architects of the past Hindu military greatness. The Guru's Khalsa, according to him, introduced a spirit of regeneration in the moribund Hindu polity. It crystallised in the rebirth of the Sikhs as a powerful sub-section of the Hindu social order challenging the fabric of the Mughal Empire. It reached the high water-mark under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the first half of nineteenth century.

While Beni Prasad had no doubt failed to maintain a clear line

of demarcation between Sikhism and Hinduism, he however took a meticulous care in identifying some of the injunctions of Guru Gobind Singh, constituting an integral part of the birth of the Khalsa. Here he practically went a step further from that of Tinkari Banerjee and furnished a list of twenty-one injunctions, many of which were missing in the Bengali biography of the Sikh Guru. Besides, he drew our attention to the significance of the abolition of caste ranking by the Guru. It resulted in a better cohesion in the Sikh society. Prasad did not generally hold a very high opinion about the Brahmins. In this regard his individual bias was perhaps reflected in the Guru's denunciation of the caste system, especially its upper echelon.

Prasad concludes his study with a critical appreciation of the long term significance of the functional role of the Khalsa on the Indian society and polity. The biographer regarded the Khalsa as a living social force, projecting a definite programme of action in our life. His insistence on the Guru's injunctions like the continuance of unity among the disciples, leading a disciplined livelihood, dissociating them from evil human designs, their readiness to fight the enemy with a corresponding firm commitment to monotheism, simultaneously rejecting priestly domination and meaningless rituals, suggest that the Khalsa was conceived to play 'a definite constructive role' in social relationship. This was not merely an important religious institution in the eyes of the author, but it had an agenda of constructive social programme for neutralising the threats of an orthodox state power and the growing menace of the caste-ridden Hindu social institutions. The Guru's Khalsa sought to provide an effective answer to both of them and he warned his readers not to fall a prey to any of these provocations contrary to the message of the Khalsa.

#### IV

In Oriya, Lingaraja Mishra furnished an outline of the circumstances leading to the birth of the Khalsa, in his brief study entitled *Guru Gobinda Simha*.<sup>8</sup> The biographer was an erudite Sanskrit scholar, sometimes served the Satyabadi school of Gopabandhu Dass, participated in the nationalist movement and edited the popular nationalist daily the *Samaj* published from Cuttack.<sup>9</sup> Like two other biographers, Mishra seems to have consulted some of the well-known secondary English sources mentioned earlier and recorded the Guru's life and mission in a simple style. The Oriya scholar tries to appreciate the message of

the Khalsa from the view point of an Indian natinoalist and reviews it as an important chapter of India's heroic tradition of the medieval days. The Guru, according to him, was committed to the regeneration of the Hindus and their fight for a rightful place against the oppression of the Mughals. His version of Sikh militarism under Guru Gobind Singh was as interesting blending of religion and nationalist politics of his time and he justified resistance on moral grounds.

The biographer was particularly concerned with the twenty-one fold instructions of the Guru communicated to his disciples at the time of the creation of the Khalsa. According to him, these were first preached by the Tenth Guru to the *Panch Piyaras* who promised to respect them in their personal life. Later on, they communicated these instructions to other members of the community assembled at Anandpur on the day of the Baisakhi. These generated a new enthusiasm among the Sikhs and served as a protective shield against the dissenters. The news however alarmed the Emperor Aurangzib and it precipitated a general conflict between the Guru's followers and the Mughals.

In spite of his scholarship and commitment to the study of history, Mishra's depiction of the birth of the Khalsa suffered from a few serious terminological and other ambiguities. His pronounced Hindu nationalist bias affected his appreciation of the message of the Khalsa and its role during the days of the declining authority of the Mughals in Punjab. Besides, he was of the opinion that the birth of the Khalsa occurred in 1698, i.e., a year ahead of the widely accepted view and he offered no argument defending his view. Again, he emphasized that the Khalsa was the other name of Sikhism ever since it was first preached by Guru Nanak in the fifteenth century and Guru Gobind Singh was credited with the birth of the Akalis (which actually should have been the Khalsa) on the day of the Baisakhi. These erroneous observations about some of the fundamental institutions of Sikhism do not necessarily speak highly of his scholarship in Sikh history, though it may be said to have reached a greater height in the writings of his contemporaries like Chintamani Acharya and Shivaprasad Dass in Oriya.

## V

These three monographs written in three different Indian Languages over a period of nearly 20 years in widely varying conditions of India may be taken up as an indicator of the extent

of interest as well as the pattern of response of some non-Sikh authors in the first half of the present century towards the creation of the Khalsa. It may be argued that one should not perhaps try to arrive at a conclusion on the basis of meagre evidence of a particular category of works. While partially endorsing the contention of the above View, these monographs may also provide a few of the distinctive marks of Sikh studies which may again be scrutinised on the basis of a detailed research to be undertaken at a later date. These authors were deeply influenced by the contemporary communal question and their three major findings in relation to the above may be listed below: (1) the Khalsa prominently stood for the revival of a militant form of Hinduism, (2) it however denied any separate communal identity to Sikhism from that of the Hindus and (3) it also conveyed a deep critical sentiment against the Mughals, emphasizing in the same breath the importance of the cooperation of the Muslims in Indian political life. It was widely believed by many of them, in the words of Bulle Shah, that '*agar na hote Guru Gobind Singh, to sunnat hoti sabh ki*'.

Perhaps an attempt at extending the frontiers of Hinduism marks an important aspect of these Sikh studies of the pre-independence decades. In this way the biographers also sought to popularise the life and teachings of the Sikh Gurus and tried to record them in a style to be easily appreciated by common people. Popular legends, symbols and imaginary dialogue among the different historical personalities constitute an interesting feature of their literary craft.<sup>10</sup> Such writings were widely appreciated by the people, many of whom had no direct access to other sources of Sikh history. In this way a popular version of the message of the Sikh Gurus and martyrs was carried to the arena of many non-Sikhs; this left behind a deep imprint on the minds of many of our predecessors and perhaps affected the evolution of Indian politics even in the post-independence decades. This popular literary touch, we, however, often miss in the writings of many of our contemporary non-Sikh academicians engaged in the pursuit of Sikh studies beyond Punjab.

## REFERENCES

- 1 For details, see Kapur Singh. 'The Tasks Before the Sikh Youth', *The Sikh Review*,

- September 1968, pp. 25-26; Madanjit Kaur, 'The Creation of the Khalsa' *Advanced Studies in Sikhism* (Chandigarh : Institute of Sikh Studies, 1989), pp: 195-213; Dr Trilochan Singh, 'Baisakhi in Sikh History'.
2. J.S. Grewal, 'The Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh', *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1982), pp.82-93; W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the, Sikh Community* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 16, H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh: The Problem of Sikh Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.43-61.
  3. Tinkari Banerjee, *Guru Gobinda Singha* (Calcutta: Sanskrit Press Depository, 1918).
  4. For their views, see Anil Chandra Banerjee, 'Sir J. N. Sarkar on Sikh History', *Guru Gobind Nanak ot Guru Gobind Sihgh* (New Delhi : Rajesh Publications, 1975)
  5. For Beni Prasad's career, see Sushila Tyagi's unpublished contribution to be published in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. I am indebted to Professor N.R. Ray for allowing me to consult this article. Beni Prasad, *Guru Gobind Singh* (Kashi: Nagri Pracharini Sabha, 1914).
  7. Beni Prasad, 'Sree Guru Gobind Singhji', *Saraswati*, October 1907, pp. 419-21.
  8. Lingaraja Mishra, *Guru Gobinda Simha* (Cuttack : Satyabadi Press, 1933).
  9. For the above information about Mishra's life, I am indebted to Dr. K. Bhyian of Anandamohan College, Calcutta.
  10. I like to draw attention to the following lines of two poems, one (A) written by Rabindranath and the other (B) by Subramania Bharati.
- (A) Come one, come all, follow me.  
 The Guru gives you the call;  
 From the depth of my inspired soul I say,  
 Awake, my whole country, awake, arise.  
 Fear no more and doubt no more,  
 Let there be no hesitation;  
 I have attained the Truth,  
 I have acquired the Path.  
 The whole humanity is trekking to follow me,  
 Caring not for life or death.  
 (Translated from the original by Dr Trilochan Singh).
- (B) No Kings for you, God is your King.  
 The Rule of Law is the only law  
 And wrong doing, your enemy.  
 Guru Gobind's flag fluttered  
 High above: the world cheered,  
 The beginning of the end  
 of Aurangzib's reign.  
 (Translated from the original by Dr Prema Nandakumar).

## 13

KOER SINGH'S GURBILAS PATHSHAHI 10:  
AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SIKH LITERATURE

MADANJIT KAUR

The study deals with an important issue of the early sources of information for Sikh Studies. Scholars dealing with Gurmukhi sources on Sikh Studies are not only handicapped by the paucity of authentic and original material at our disposal but are seriously confronted with the problem of dating, authorship and authenticity of the original texts incorporated in these sources. The study of these manuscripts presents a complex pattern of medieval Punjabi genre because we have mostly copies of different versions of these texts rather than the original manuscripts at our disposal. This problem becomes much more multiple, when scholars interpreting and assessing these sources make subjective assertions.

The focus of this paper is to authenticate the dating of Koer Singh's *Gureilas Patshahi* 10, an important source of information about major events on the life and mission of Guru Gobind Singh and the founding of the Khalsa.

The present study proposes to make a scrutiny of some views expressed recently by a scholar rejecting the authenticity of Koer Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi* 10 as an eighteenth century source of Sikh literature. The burden of his arguments and thesis presented in 'A *Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature* (1988) can be delineated as under :-

- (i) The supposed clue to its date is ambiguous
- (ii) A large number of passages is proved to have been lifted from Sukha Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin*, a work of A.D 1797.
- (iii) The heterodox beliefs of the author and Hindu portrayal of Guru Gobind Singh do not vouchsafe for it, or the period claimed for it.

- (iv) The account of *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* contains certain ideas which would have been suicidal and silly for the Sikhs in the middle of the eighteenth century.
- (v) The presence of post-eventum prophecies regarding internal conflict among Turks.
- (vi) The echoes of differences between the Majha and Malwa Sikhs.
- (vii) That the author of the *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* mentions the presence of the English in the country.
- (viii) That the conciliatory tone of the author of the *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* towards the Muslims carries a strong imprint of Sikh rule under Ranjit Singh.
- (ix) That the increasing number of men coming in the Sikh fold had to be educated in the rudiments of Sikhism, which led to the dilution of Sikh tenets in the welter of traditional beliefs.

Thus the scholar seeks to cast a doubt on the time of the work as well as on its authorship.<sup>2</sup> The date of compilation given at the end of the work<sup>3</sup> has been dubbed as ambiguous, and the change of metre in the last stanza of the couplet embodying the date of the work is supposed to warrant this conclusion.<sup>4</sup> But how? He does not show. He very conveniently dismisses without discussing the internal evidence with regard to the authorship of the work,<sup>5</sup> produced by Dr. Fauja Singh in his introduction to the published edition of Koer Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* edited by Shamsher Singh Ashok.<sup>6</sup> This over-simplified device applied in rejecting the dating of Koer Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* as eighteenth century forbodes a subjective bias of the author. The damage of this step becomes clear when we keep before us writings of some western scholars who, by raising unbecoming controversies, are out, not only to decry, but also to demolish the very foundation of Sikhism: undo its doctrines, undermine the status of its founder, question evolution of the Sikh community, cast doubt on the genuineness of Sikh codes of conduct (*Rahitnamas*) and find fault with the question of 'Sikh' identity and definition of a 'Sikh'.

The question of the dating of this important work is very significant, for on its authenticity depends the resolution of many very intricate problems relating to the founding of the *Khalsa*, the *Panj Pyaras*, the *rahit* of the Sikh symbols (Five K's) and succession of the *Guru Granth Sahib* as Guru after the death of the Tenth Master. This is so, for the view expressed in *A Reconstruction of Sikh*



*History* tends to confirm the theses presented earlier in the writings of Dr. W.H. Mcleod<sup>7</sup> who categorically rejects the traditional account about the founding of the *Khalsa* on the Baisakhi day of AD. 1699<sup>8</sup> and holds that the Sikh *Rahit Maryada* and Sikh symbols (Five K's) were evolved sometime during the eighteenth century and were not prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi Day of A.D.1699 .<sup>9</sup>

As the limited purpose of this paper is to re-interpret the dating of Koer' Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, we shall concentrate on the internal evidence of the work supporting and authenticating its authorship and dating.

(1) The chief merit of Koer Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* is that the date of the completion of the work is explicitly given at the end of the account as under:

ਸੰਮਤ ਬਸੁ ਇਕਾਦਸ ਤਾਹਿ ਮੈਂ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਸੁ ਮਾਸ ਕੇ ਦਿਵਸ ਸੰਝਾਰੀ ॥  
ਦ ਹਰਾ । ਅਠ ਦਸ ਸੰਮਤ ਪ੍ਰਥਮ ਬਰ, ਮਾਸ ਕੁਆਰ ਕ ਆਹਿ ॥\*

The date of this work was calculated by Bhai Vir Singh as 1819 Bikrami (A.D. 1762). He clearly takes into account both the word *Basu* which represents eight and the word *ekadsi* which means eleven. But Shamsheer Singh Ashok and Fauja Singh, it appears, accept 1808 Bikrami (A.D. 1751) as the date of start of the work and 1811 Bikrami (AD. 1754) as the date of conclusion of the work. Hence, it is not correct that the word *ekadsi* has not been taken into account or kept unexplained. In fact, Bhai Vir Singh's work clearly took this into account in arriving at its date as 1819 Bikrami (AD. 1762). Hans's second argument about the change of meter at the end of the dating is without any basis. It appears Hans is not aware of the fact that the meter had to be changed because the four lines of the *Swaya* had ended earlier and Koer Singh's option was either to restart another *Swaya* of four lines or repeat a *Dohera* as he has done here and at numerous other places in the text.<sup>13</sup> Hence, the criticism about the date, which is the strongest point of the writing, is without any rationality. We can, thus, very clearly and safely place the work between A.D. 1751 and A.D. 1762 and there can be no doubt about its being a mid-18th century work. By no stretch of imagination can the unambiguous date be ignored. Had Koer Singh wanted to predate his work, he would never have given the date clearly and claimed only to have received the account from Bhai Mani Singh's lectures. If he had any desire to pre-date his work, he could easily claim to be the contemporary of the Master

as some writers of Rehtnamas have done. Hence, authenticity of the date or the timing of this work is unchallengeable.

(2) *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* written by Koer Singh sometime in A.D. 1751-1762 is thus anterior to Sukha Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* which was completed in A.D.1797. Therefore, there is no question of Koer Singh's indebtedness to Sukha Singh. Besides, Koer Singh's work is primarily based on the narration of events by eye witness contemporaries of the Tenth Master. In fact, the work is an anthology of discourses delivered by Bhai Mani Singh<sup>14</sup> who received Amrit from the Tenth Master. This inference is authenticated by internal (evidence of *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* which mentions this categorically:

ਮਨੀ ਸਿੰਘ ਏ ਬਚਨ ਅਲਾਏ । ਸੁਨੋ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਜੀ ਚਿਤ ਲਾਏ ॥  
ਇਹ ਧਰਮਗ ਕਥਾ ਮੈ ਭਾਈ। ਬਡ ਵਿਸਥਾਰ ਸੁਖਮ ਕਰ ਰਾਖੀ ॥

This is not the only reference to Mani Singh, there are other references too. Even the concluding part of the work expresses acknowledgement of the debt he owes to Bhai Mani Singh for the entire account'

ਦਿਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰ ਬੀਸ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਮਨੀ ਸਿੰਘ ਮਤ ਵਖਯਾਨ ਰਰਨਨੰ ਨਾਮ ਇਕੀਸਮੇ ਧਯਾਇ  
ਕਬਿ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਪੰਥ ਵਰਨਨੰ, ਪਯਾਨ ਚਾਰ ਸਮਾਪਤੰ । ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਜੀ ਸਹਾਇ ॥<sup>16</sup>

This is another factor showing its non-dependence upon Sukha Singh's *Gurbilas* for its narration. There is however, no doubt that Koer Singh's *Gurbilas* drew on 'Bachitra Natak' (part of *Dasem Granth*), *Gursobha* (Saina Pat) and *Jangnama* (Anni Rai)<sup>17</sup>

Koer Singh preceded later writers of *Gurbilases*. Material for many events and even verbatim passages recorded in Sukha Singh's *Gurbilas*. (A.D. 1797), therefore, appear to have been lifted from Koer Singh's work and not the other way round. While Koer Singh clearly indicates the source of his information, there is no ground to suggest an inverted inference as drawn by the learned author. Therefore, the presence of a large number of common couplets in both these works does not form any reason to place the dating of Koer Singh's work in nineteenth century; There is no indication to suggest that Koer Singh's work is later than that of Sukha Singh. .

(3) It is clear from the internal evidence that *Gurbilas Patshaht 10* was written by Koer Singh Kalal,<sup>18</sup> who was a Sahajdhari Sikh and perhaps, took *Khande di Pahul* if at all, at a very later stage. He himself apprises us of this fact:

ਕੁਇਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਕਲਾਲ ਅਤਿ ਜੋਈ । ਰਹੈ ਕੰਬੋਅਨ ਅੰਗਨ ਸੋਈ ।  
ਨਾਮ ਮਾਤ੍ਰੀ ਸਿੰਘ ਹੋ ਭਾਈ । ਪੂਰਬ ਖੰਡੇ ਪਾਹੁਲ ਨ ਲਈ ॥

For this reason, the account of Sikh belief-system recorded in his *Gurbilas* lacks adequate understanding and naturally suffers from introduction therein of his Brahmanic convictions and puranic vision. It appears he has at places projected his old convictions and personal beliefs in explaining Sikh theology and Sikh practices as also futurology of Sikh history. His statements about the prophecies made by Guru Gobind Singh in this regard can be seen as post-eventum rather than prophecies.<sup>20</sup> Thus, mythology and history merge as the subjective correlation of Puranic inheritance of the author with the societal role of Sikh ideology in which he does not seem to hesitate giving way to his Sanatanist beliefs while purporting to write about the life and works of the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh.

A socio-cultural study of the text of Koer Singh's *Gurbilas* reveals that the work excels in the application of epic dimension to mythic sensibility. Even a cursory survey of the text would reveal that *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* is a typical medieval Indian text, the popular genre of the eighteenth century Punjabi literature.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the impact of Vedic culture and Puranic school of thought is visible in the modes of literary forms applied by Koer Singh in his account.<sup>22</sup>

This factor is primarily responsible for drawing the conclusion that its author, Koer Singh, "held heterodox beliefs" and depicted "Guru Gobind Singh as worshipper of the Goddess"<sup>23 24</sup> and presented a "Hinduized portrayal of Guru Gobind Singh",<sup>25</sup> that the Guru remained detached and passed on the responsibility of creation of the *Khalsa Panth* on the Goddess herself, the Khalsa was placed at the feet of the Goddess and the Guru was an incarnation to destroy the Turk-Malechas.<sup>26</sup>

(4) The fourth argument forwarded in rejecting *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* as eighteenth century work is that the author of the *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* does not show much sympathy with the people, for example:

'One should be ever vigilant. The officials should not get involved with the people. One should be efficient, neither too friendly nor too inimical to one's subjects. People are like lions (singhs) who find friends in none.'<sup>27</sup> It is preposterous for a Singh, much more for

Guru Gobind Singh, to hold such a doctrine. 'The subjects need a strong hand to deal with,'<sup>28</sup> Women, people, land and money are faithful to none.'<sup>29</sup> 'Such ideas would have been simply suicidal and silly for the Sikhs to hold in the middle of the eighteenth century.'<sup>30</sup>

These were the stock ideas held by medieval Hindu scholars 'as a legacy of Manu and Chankaya. It has already been stated that Koer Singh is a person with strong Brahmanical sentiments and leanings. Hence this suggestion against women and for 'discriminatory or hierarchical beliefs is natural from him. The objection of Hans is again without any meaning because such Brahmanical expression of views against woman and equality is not only contrary to the Sikh views of the 18th century but they are opposed to the Guru Granth itself. Hence, Hans's argument is hardly relevant regarding the dating of the work on this account.

(5) Fifthly, Koer Singh's statement about the conflict between the Turks and the consequent opportunity for the Sikhs to establish their rule seen by our scholar as *post eventum* prophecies is not sustainable.<sup>31</sup> Koer Singh was composing his work at a time (AD. 1751-1762) when the Afghan invasions of the Punjab were on and the disintegration of the Mughal power was on the anvil. The Afghan-Mughal conflict proved it golden opportunity to the Sikhs. Under the able leadership of Sardar Kapur Singh Faizullapuria, the Sikhs had already organised themselves into *Dal Khalsa* (Military groups of the Sikhs). Sardar Kapur Singh had come to be addressed as the *Padshah* (King) or Nawab of the Sikhs. He was the supreme commander of the *Dal Khalsa*. At the meeting of the *Dal Khalsa* on the Baisakhi day of 1748 at Amritsar, which was almost synchronous with the first Abdali invasion, on the proposal of Kapur Singh, the chief command of the *Dal Khalsa* was reorganised into twelve *mils* (Confederacies).<sup>32</sup>

The Sikhs in collaboration with Kaura Mal had defeated the A "hans.<sup>33</sup> They were offered a *Jagir* by Mir Mannu.<sup>34</sup> During the third Afghan invasion (AD. 1751-52) Punjab virtually passed under Sikh protection until Lahore and Multan were ceded to Ahmed Shah Abdali (AD. April 1752).<sup>35</sup> The Sikhs reconsolidated their position and spread out in Bari Doab, Jullundur Doab and across the Sutlej;

They crossed the Jehlum and subdued the Musilm tribes of the region by the end of the same year.<sup>36</sup> Keeping this background in view one can easily imagine, that the vision of Koer Singh in

making prophetic statements through Guru Gobind Singh about the future development of the Sikh history is a by-product of the historical events witnessed by the author himself. It does not demerit the dating of the work, rather, it supports the fact that the recorded date of the work, A.D. 1751-1762, is correct.

For two reasons Hans's argument carries no weight. First, as indicated above even if it is assumed that it was a post-event prophecy, the event in fact had taken place before Koer Singh wrote his book. Second, that the practice of attributing prophecies to saints was a common trait of the period. And, in fact, Senapat, who wrote his book in early 18th century and was a contemporary of the Tenth Master has also recorded virtually the same prophecy regarding the defeat of the Turks and the dominance of the Sikhs. If Hans's rationale is stretched it would lead to an evidently ridiculous suggestion that Senapat was a person of the 19th century.

(6) The sixth argument forwarded for rejecting its recorded date and considering the *Gurbilas Patshahi* 10 as nineteenth century work is that, "there are echoes of differences between the Majha and the Malwa Sikhs" ...<sup>37</sup> "The acceptance of British overlordship by the Sikh chiefs of the Malwa could form the background for this opinion of the Malwais."<sup>38</sup> This is a far fetched conclusion. The Malwa states passed under the protectorate of the British in A.D.1809. But the Sikh chiefs of the Malwa region had throughout maintained an attitude of indifference to the *Khalsa* cause; and, if at all they took any interest, it favoured the Afghans. The Patiala House owed their extensive states and important position largely to the favours conferred by Ahmad Shah and they also professed submission to the Afghans. For this reason the Malwais were held in contempt by the Majha Sikhs.<sup>39</sup> Koer Singh's apathy and bias towards Malwais had been generated on account of Malwa Sikhs's lack of dedication to *Khalsa* convictions and the selfish behaviour of Phulkian misal which seldom joined the *Dal Khalsa* and did not come forward to join the Majha Sikhs in any campaign against the enemy of the *Khalsa*. Rather the Malwais sometimes acted against the interests of the community.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the above argument is frivolous.

(7) The seventh argument for the dating of Koer Singh's *Gurbilas* as nineteenth century work is that, "the author of the *Gurbilas Patshahi* 10 was familiar with the presence of the English (*Firangi* of Koer Singh) in the country."<sup>41</sup> This argument again is

frivolous and is based on lack of knowledge of the induction of this word in Indian literature. Koer Singh has mentioned the term *firang*<sup>42</sup> Awareness about firangis (the Europeans) in India is to be met in various Persian sources of seventeenth and the sixteenth centuries.<sup>43</sup> The word even stands used in the ' *Akal Ustat* ' by Guru Gobind Singh<sup>44</sup> which is anterior to Koer Singh's work.

(8) Hans looks upon *Gurbilas Patshahi* 10 as the nineteenth century work on the basis of the argument that:

The conciliatory tone of the author of *Gurbilas Patshahi* 10 towards the Muslim...together with the Hindu portrayal of Guru Gobind Singh, makes one suspect that the *Gurbilas Patshahi* 10 carries a strong imprint of Sikh rule under Ranjit Singh for whom it was absolutely necessary to hold three communities in some kind of a balance.'<sup>45</sup>

The question is that if the author is simply projecting the political exegesis of the Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, why has not Koer Singh mentioned any historical reference to the Maharaja's rule in the related context? It is an accepted fact that the theory of sovereignty followed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh was that of a Benevolent Monarchy and trusteeship of a Welfare State.

Here again Hans's argument is based on two assumptions. First, it is baseless to suggest that Ranjit Singh's human treatment of his non-Muslim subjects was born out of sheer opportunism and was not because of the Sikh ideology and ethos to which the seals of all the Sikh rulers bear testimony. Benevolent liberalism of the Sikhs was an integral character of the Sikh society, quite incongruous with the contemporary and earlier rulers of the times. Second, that the Sikh rule and the liberal treatment of the subjects is a phenomenon of the 18th century as evidenced by the rule of Kapur Singh, Jassa Singh Kalal and at the time of conciliation with Mir Mannu through Kaura Ma1.<sup>46</sup>

At any rate the Sikhs did not oppress the innocents as is vouchsafed by the writings of Qazi Nur Mohammad who says 'they (The Sikhs) do not stand in the way of fugitives; nor molest a woman.'<sup>47</sup>

(9) Lastly, Hans relates his hypothesis about the expansion of the Lahore Kingdom out of its true context and forwards it as supplement to justify his argument mentioned above by asserting that:

the expansion of Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh marked a new departure in the evolution of Sikhism. Rulership was aspired to but never fully visualized in the Sikh doctrines. The position was further complicated by the minority status of the rulers. Thus the bonds with the Hindu constituency had to be strengthened. The Muslim population had to be pacified not only administratively but also doctrinally. Furthermore, the increasing number of men coming into the Sikh fold had to be educated in the rudiments of Sikhism, a process which led to the dilution of Sikh tenets in the welter of traditional beliefs.<sup>48</sup>

It is clear that the scholar is deliberately making a misrepresentation of Sikhism and distorting the unity of Sikh thought for the sake of rejecting *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* as eighteenth century work. It is also derived from his thesis put forth in *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature* that the history of Sikhism is an evolution of the product of historical factors rather than of its fundamental doctrines. There is no historical evidence to support the view that theoretically there was any departure in the fundamentals of Sikhism in the course of the development of the history of the Sikhs. In reality the Sikhs had successfully faced challenges both of Mughal oppression and of reabsorption into the Brahmanical Hinduism. However powerful the Sikh rulers had been, they could not afford to formulate any dilution in the Sikh doctrines enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib. Therefore the last argument of Hans carries the imprint of not only a misconception but also of misinterpretation of the authenticity and unity of the thought and traditional beliefs of Sikhism in order to support the view expressed by Mcleod earlier in his various writings.

### *Conclusion*

A critical analysis of the subject under study cannot escape the attention of a discerning scholar that the views expressed about *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* in Hans's *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature* (1988) are incorrect assertions about a significant source of early history of the Sikhs and are based on self-contradictory statements and textual analysis, without a rational exegesis of the hypothesis adopted by the scholar.

## REFERENCES

1. Surjit Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature*, ABS Publications, Cosmic Printers Modern Market, N.C. Road, Jalandhar, 1988, p.206.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* (ed. Shamsheer Singh Ashok, Introduction by Fauja Singh.) Punjabi University, Patiala, 1967, p. 295.
4. Hans, *op.cit.*, p.266.
5. *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, *op.cit.*, pp.47,99,294-95.
6. *Ibid.*, Introduction, pp.1-2.
7. His Publications are :  
*Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Oxford, 1968;  
*The Evolution of the Sikh community*, Oxford, 1979;  
*Early Sikh Tradition*, Oxford, 1980; The Chaupa Singh Rahitnama Duncdin, 1987; *The Sikhs, History, Religion and Society*, New York, 1989; *Who is Sikh?* Oxford, 1989.
8. Evaluating the traditional interpretation of the founding of the Khalsa, McLeods observes;  
 We may be sure that something certainly did happen on that Baisakhi day of 1699, and that some of the traditions will eventually turn out to be substantially accurate. Moreover, there can be no doubt that the Khalsa did eventually establish an effective claim to represent the orthodox form of the Sikh Panth. Already, however it is possible to demonstrate that many of the traditions are historiographical phenomena, features which developed subsequently but which came, in even later interpretations, to be related to the time and intention of Guru Gobind Singh.  
*-The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1975, p.16.
9. *Ibid*, pp51-52.
10. Koer Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, p.295
11. Bhai Vir Singh, *Devi Punjan Pardal*, Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar 1963, footnote pp.55-56.
12. Hans, *Op.cit.*, p.266.
13. Koer Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, p.296.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p.295.
16. *Ibid.*, p.296.
17. *Ibid.*, Introduction, p.3.
18. *Ibid.*, p.294.
19. *Ibid.*, p.295.
20. ਆਪਸ ਮੇਂ ਵਹੁ ਲਰੈਂ ਅਲਾਪ ॥  
 ਖਾਲਸੇ ਬੀਚ ਆਪ ਮੇਂ । ਤੁਰਕਨ ਕੇ ਨਿਸ਼ਦਿਨ ਮੈਂ ਦਹੋ ।  
*Ibid.*, p. 27  
 Also



ਜਹਿ ਤੁਰਕਨ ਕੇ ਹੋਇ ਅਖਾਰੇ । ਜਾਇ ਸੀਸ ਲਾਗੇ ਬਹੁ ਪਯਾਰੇ ।  
ਤਾਹਿ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਕਰ ਹੈ ਰਾਜ । ਸੀਸ ਲਾਗੇ ਜੋ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕਾਰ ॥  
Ibid., p. 283

21. Mythic identification of the life history of the Sikh Gurus is not new for scholars familiar with the nature of sources of information of Sikh history. Most of these accounts were written by Brahmin authors or *Udasis or Nirmalas* who were educated in Vedantic institutions. The impact of their training is clearly reflected in their writings. Most important among them are Kesar Singh Chibbar, *Banasawalinama Dasam Patshaian Ka, Sohan Kavi, Gurbilas Patshahi* 6. *Koer Singh Gurbilas Patshahi* 10, Sarup Das Bhalla *Mahima Prakash*, Santokh Singh, *Nanak Prakash* and *Suraj Prakash Granth* etc.
22. See the structural framework of the various episodes recounted in different chapters of his *Gurbilas Patshahi* 10.
23. Hans, *Op.cit.*, p.267.
24. *Gurbilas Patshahi* 10, *Op.cit.*, p.175.
25. *Ibid.*, pp.37,43,59,68,71,79,84, 100,26,127,258.
26. ਹੇਹ ਭਾੀ ਕੌਤਕ ਕੀਨ ਹੁ, ਜੋ ਮਨ ਪਰ ਉਪਕਾਰ ।  
ਆਪ ਨਿਆਰੇ ਹੋਇ ਕੈ . ਧਰ ਦੇਵੀ ਸਿਰ ਭਾਰ ।  
ਪੰਥ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਮਾਤ ਪਦ, ਡਾਰਾ ਐਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ ।  
ਤੁਰਕ ਮਲੋਛਨ ਨਾਸ ਕੇ, ਹੈ ਗੁਰੂ ਕੇ ਅਵਤਾਰ ॥
27. ਸਵਾਧਾਨ ਮਨ ਅਪਨਾ ਕੀਜੈ । ਦਫ਼ਤਰ ਮੁਨਸੀ ਰੋਯਤ ਨ ਭੀਜੈ ।  
ਨਹਿ ਅਤਿ ਵੈਰ ਨ ਮਿਤ੍ਰਚਾਰੀ । ਨਿਪੁਨ ਸੁ ਕਾਰਜ ਮੈ ਨਿਰਧਾਰੀ ।  
ਰੋਯਤ ਨਜਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਕੀ ਹੋਈ । ਅਪਨਾ ਮਿਤ੍ਰ ਨ ਜਾਨੈ ਕੋਈ ।
28. ਤਯੋਰੋਯਤ ਕੇ ਬੀਚ ਪਛਾਨੇ । ਇਨ ਕੋ ਤਾੜਨ ਅਧਿਕ ਪਛਾਨੇ ।  
ਚਾਰ ਮਿਤ੍ਰ ਇਹ ਕਿਸ ਕੇ ਨਾਹੀ । ਜੇ ਹੋਵੈ ਡਪਕਰਮਨ ਤਾਹੀ ।  
Ibid., p.260
29. ਨਾਰਿ ਸੁ ਰੋਯਤ ਜਿਮੀ ਪਛਾਨੇ । ਔਲਛਮੀ ਕੀ ਗੀਤਹਿ ਜਾਨੇ ।  
ਚਾਰ ਮਿਤ੍ਰ ਇਹ ਕਿਸ ਕੇ ਨਾਹੀ । ਜੇ ਹੋਵੈ ਅਪਕਰਮਨ ਤਾਹੀ ।  
Ibid.,
30. Hans, *Op.cit.*, pp.268-269.
31. *Ibid.*, p.269.
32. Sohan Lal *Suri Umat-ut- Tawarikh* (Persian), 1885, Lahore, Dafter n, p. viii, Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, Orient Longmans, Bombay, 1950, p.136.
33. *Tarikh-i-Ahmad Shahi*, pp.23-24, *Terikh-i-Muzzafari*(Persian), p.457; Ali-ud-Din Mufti, *Ibratnama* (Persian) Ms, 1854, p.238, Sohan Lal Suri *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Dafter I, pp.129-131 as quoted by Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, p.141 also Gian Singh Giani, *Shamsher Khalsa*, Part II, Bhasha vibhag Punjab Patiala, 1970, p.169; Rattan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Prakash*, Fifth Edition, Khalsa Samachar Amritsar, 1982, pp.329-331.

34. Gian Singh Giani, *Shamsher Khalsa, Part-II*, p.165; Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, p.139.
35. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *Op.cit.*, p.139
36. *Ibid.*, p.147.
37. Hans, *Gp.cit.*, p.269.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *O.p.cit.*, YoU, p.164. Kushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Oxford University Press Delhi, 1977, Vol. I, p.135.
40. *Ibid.*, also, Rattan Singh Bhangu, *op.cit.*, p. 324; Karam Singh *Maharaja Ala Singh* (Punjabi), Khalsa Parcharak Vidyala, Taran Tarn, 1819, pp. 207-213.
41. Hans, *op.cit.*, p.269.
42. *Gurbilas Patshahi* 10, p.259.
43. See Court Chronicles produced during the time of the Mughal Emperors-Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan.
44. ਬੰਗ ਕੇ ਬੰਗਾਲੀ ਫਿਰੰਗ ਕੇ ਫਿਰੰਗਵਾਲੀ ਦਿਲੀ ਕੇ ਦਿਲਵਾਲੀ ਤੇਰੀ ਆਗਿਆ ਮੇਂ ਚਲਤ ਹੈਂ ॥  
ਰੋਹ ਕੇ ਤੁਹੇਲੇ ਮਾਘ ਦੇਸ ਕੇ ਮਘੇਲੇ ਬੀਰ ਬੰਗਾਲੀ ਬੰਦੇਲੇ ਪਾਪ ਪੁੰਜ ਕੇ ਮਨਤ ਹੈਂ ॥  
'*Akal Ustat*', 255, Sri *Dasam Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, ed. Giani Mohinder Singh pub.  
Jawahar Singh Kirpal Singh Amritsar, 1966, p.38.
45. Hans, *Op.cit.*, p.269.
46. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *op.cit.*, p.132; Khushwant Singh *Gp.cit.*, p. 130.
47. Nur Muhammad, Qazi, *fang Namah* (Ms. 1778, A.H., A.D. 1764-65) Persian,  
Eng. Tr by Ganda Singh, Pub.KhaIsa College Amritsar, 1939, Ch. XLI.
48. Surjit S. Hans, *The Gurbilas in the Early Nineteenth Century* in *Journal of Regional History*, Department of History, Gurur Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Vol.II, 1981, p.56

## 14

## THE SIKHS AND THE BRITISH - 1849-1920

GURDARSHAN SINGH DHILLON.

Recently many scholars, especially in the West, have contended that the assertion of a distinct Sikh identity in the mid-nineteenth century was very largely due to advertent support extended by the British. W.H. McLeod holds that "there were several Sikh identities available during the period immediately following the 1849 annexation and one such identity (the militant Khalsa version) was vigorously promoted by the British in order to serve their own military purposes. The same identity was accepted by the stronger<sup>1</sup> of the Singh Sabha leaders and became the focus of their reforming activities late in the nineteenth century."<sup>2</sup> Richard Fox refers to the Sikhs in the Indian army "transmuted into Singhs by the British."<sup>3</sup> Scholars like N .G. Barrier and Rajiv Kapur have also referred to the recruiting and organisational policy of the British Indian army as the instrument for fostering the distinct Sikh identity. Rajiv Kapur observes: "Recruitment into the army provided strong encouragement for the development and maintenance of a separate Sikh identity."<sup>4</sup> Barrier<sup>5</sup> and Fox<sup>6</sup> both find themselves caught in an intricate and incoherent analysis of the British motives in dealing with the Sikhs.

*The Relevant Questions are:* Did not the Sikh leaders invoke the Sikh doctrine in the Guru Granth? Was it not inevitable for a Sikh movement, aimed at restoring the purity of Sikhism, to remove outside accretions, including Hindu influences and make the Sikhs stand on their own ground un-encumbered? Was it not necessary for the Sikhs to go through a discipline of education in order to equip themselves for participation in the political life? Is it right to brand the Singh Sabha leaders as loyalists and accuse them of misguiding the community to serve the ends of the British In India? Did not the Sikhs have to wage a long battle to maintain their religious institutions and practices and free their Gurdwaras

from the control of the Mahants and Pujaris, who enjoyed the patronage and backing of the British? Is it right or misleading for the historians to talk of the role of the British military policy in promoting the Sikh identity and to make a complete black out of the Sikh ideology and four hundred years of the Guru period and Sikh history? How can they turn a blind eye to the patronage extended by the British to the Mahants (Priests) at the Sikh temples who because of their background opposed the Sikh identity tooth and nail?

In deriving some of their hasty and illconceived inferences, the writers fail to study the subject methodically and to see the Singh Sabha Movement and its work in the background of (a) the Sikh ideology, (b) the method and history of the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh movement in the preceding three hundred and fifty years and (c) the general and overall historical perspective of ideological movements during their lean periods. Therefore, in order to make a comprehensive and methodical study of the subject, we shall divide our paper under the following heads: (i) the Sikh ideology, (ii) the preparatory period of educating and motivating the masses, (iii) reviving institutions and centres of the faith to rebuild the Panth and its distinct identity and the final stage of political preparation and struggle, (iv) realities of the situation after the annexation of Punjab and factors hostile to Sikh identity, (v) the Singh Sabha Movement and its plan of work, activities and achievements, (vi) the preparatory stage leading to the second stage of Gurdwara Reform Movement and participation in political struggle, (vii) general historical perspective, and (viii) conclusion.

First of all we shall take up salient features of the Sikh religion, especially where Sikhism made a radical departure from the earlier religious traditions.

*Sikh Ideology:* Sikhism is a revelatory religion, which revolted against the religious hypocrisy of the Brahmins and the political oppression of the contemporary rulers. Guru Nanak the founder of the Sikh religion stressed the unity of God<sup>7</sup> and the brotherhood of man.<sup>8</sup> He attacked such pillars of the Hindu society as caste,<sup>9</sup> idolatry<sup>10</sup> ritualism,<sup>11</sup> asceticism<sup>12</sup> and intermediary role of the priests<sup>13</sup> in man's relations with God. His spiritual thesis, with an inalienable social content, sought to establish equality not only between man and man but also between man and woman. He welded the spiritual and the temporal planes of human existence into a harmonious whole and brought about reconciliation

between the religious and the secular means for achieving the best results in human affairs.<sup>14</sup> The Guru's followers were not required to chant Sanskrit Shalokas before stone idols but sang hymns composed by the Guru himself in their mother tongue. They came to have different places and modes of worship. It was not an easy task to confront the dogmatism of the priest dominated and caste-ridden Hindu society. The Guru brought about a far-reaching transformation in the minds of the people through the institutions of Shabad, Sangat, Pangat, Guru-Ka-Langar, Guru and Dharmsal. The three cardinal principles of Guru's teachings were: 'Kirt Karo' (earn your bread through hard labour), 'Vand Chakko' (Share your earnings with others) and 'Naam Japo' (always remember God). This resulted in building a separate and self-reliant community with new beliefs and institutions.

The process of separation was carried forward by the second Sikh Guru Angad. He introduced the Gurmukhi script, in which he compiled Guru Nanak's and his own compositions. The Guru was opposed to mendicancy and parasitical living. He earned his own living by twisting coarse grass strings used for cots. The third Guru Amar Das took many steps which tended to break further the affiliations of the Sikhs with the Hindus. He introduced new forms of ceremonials for birth, death and marriage. He deprecated the practice of 'Purdah' and 'Sati', encouraged inter-caste alliances and re-marriage of widows. He declared that the Sikhs who were active householders were wholly separate from the passive and recluse 'Udasis' whom he excluded from the Sikh Society. The Guru established twenty two new centres or parishes (*Manjis*) for conveying the message of Guru Nanak to the people.

These centres were supposed to cater both to the religious and the empirical needs of the people. Guru Ram Das, who succeeded him as the fourth Guru, acquired the site of the present city of Amritsar which became the religious capital of the Sikhs. He had a tank dug around which bazars or trading centres were established.

Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, took some very important steps for fortifying the Sikh identity. He raised the Harmandir and gave to the Sikhs a central place and shrine of their own. This was to wean away Sikhs from Hindu institutions like those at Hardawar, Varanasi, etc. He also gave the Sikhs a scripture of their own in the form of Granth Sahib, which they could read and understand. They did not require the help of Brahmin priests to read out Sanskrit

texts from the Vedas or the Upanishads, which they did not understand. It was Guru Arjan, who very clearly and emphatically declared that the Sikhs were an independent community:

“I do not keep the Hindu fast,  
nor the Muslim Ramadan;  
I serve Him alone who is my refuge,  
I serve the one Master who is also Allah,  
I have broken with the Hindu and the Muslim,  
I will not worship with the Hindu nor like  
The Muslim go to Mecca,  
I shall serve Him and no other,  
I will not pray to idols nor say the Muslim prayer;  
I shall put my heart at the feet of the One Supreme Being;  
For we are neither Hindus nor Mussalmans”<sup>15</sup>

Guru made, for the principles of his religion, the Supreme sacrifice of his life and became the first martyr in Sikh history. Guru Arjan's son and successor Guru Hargobind started military preparations. His resort to arms was in keeping with the last instructions of his father. Guru Nanak too had rejected Ahimsa as an inviolable religious doctrine. Facing the Harmandir, Guru Hargobind built the Akal Takhat, a seat of the temporal authority as distinct from Harmandir Sahib, clearly signifying that the Sikhs owed their primary allegiance to God. He also set, up two flags fluttering before it as visible symbols of Miri and Piri, i.e. the temporal and the religious authorities. The concept of Miri and Piri was the natural and inevitable outcome of the doctrine of the combination of the spiritual and the empirical laid down by the first Guru. That this combination is fundamental to the Sikh doctrine is clear from the fact that in Sikhism the insignia for Piri or spiritualism is a sword and not a rosary. 'Many of the misunderstandings by scholars of Sikhism or its history are due to their failure to have an adequate knowledge of the Sikh ideology. This lack of knowledge, or sometimes bias, is quite apparent among scholars drawn from pacifist or dichotomous religions.

The ninth Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur suffered martyrdom to counter the forces of tyranny and injustice and to uphold the freedom of man to practice his religion. He demonstrated that to lay down one's life in defence of righteousness was a paramount religious duty. When a report was sent to Emperor Aurangzeb that the Guru was organising a people (*Millat*), he offered to the Guru that if he confined his activities to prayers and preachings,

he would be given grants for the purpose, provided he gave up his political activities. But the Guru declined the offer.<sup>16</sup> The inspiration stemming from the creative vision of Guru Nanak reached its climax under the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. The ideal of Saint-Soldier implicit in the Miri-Piri doctrine of Guru Nanak fructified in the creation of the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh. It was the objective of the Sikh society or Khalsa to restore justice and harmony in the prevailing state of affairs. He created the Khalsa, a disciplined body of Sikhs, and conferred upon them a distinct look. He gave them a martial name 'Singh' (Lion) and prescribed five Kakars including kirpan and unshorn hair. In fact, the rule about keeping unshorn hair started a debate and those wanting to shave hair and to follow Hindu customs were automatically excluded from the Sikh society.<sup>17</sup> The symbols strengthened religious discipline, gave external uniformity to the Sikh faith and served as aids to the preservation of the corporate life of the community. It is very important that the egalitarian principle was an accepted and practiced norm of the Sikh society. It is noteworthy that four out of the five Piaras (Beloved ones), who offered their heads to the Guru and were baptised were Shudras. He intended to make a complete break with the past religious tradition through the introduction of Nash doctrine involving Kirtnash, Kulnash, Dharamnash, Bharamnash and Karamnash<sup>18</sup> i.e. the giving up of all those beliefs, ideologies and practices that came in the way of the sole worship of the One Supreme Being. The creation of the Khalsa was a unique phenomenon in the annals of mankind. It was the epitome of the Sikh movement. There is no evidence, whatsoever, to suggest that there was any other Sikh identity or society promoted by the Gurus or in existence in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. The Guru raised the Indian spirit from servility, interiority, fatalism and defeatism to the dynamic ideal of responsible reaction and resistance against tyranny and injustice. The supreme acts of martyrdom of the Guru, his father, mother and four sons for the cause of righteousness left an indelible stamp on the Sikh way of life. It is sheer idleness to think or suggest that the deep seated moral conditioning formed by the longest chain of martyrdoms and conscious struggles, could just be re-created or affected by any wishful self-interest of the British or any other ruler. Such artificial creation of religious identity are unknown to history.

During his life time Guru Gobind Singh chose Banda Singh

Bahadur to conduct the final phase of the Sikh struggle against the Mughal Empire. It was under his leadership that the Khalsa armies won decisive victories and shook the very foundations of the mighty Mughal Empire. Banda struck coins in the name of the Khalsa Panth. The inscriptions on the coins are significant: "This coin is struck as a token of our sovereignty here and hereafter. This divine bounty flows from the sword of Nanak (Tegh-i-Nanak) and the victory and felicity is the gift of Guru Gobind Singh, the king of kings, the true Master." <sup>19</sup>

This coin itself clearly signifies that in the consciousness of the Sikhs of those times, there was complete unity of spirit and ideology between the first and the last Gurus and in fact among all Gurus. It clearly shows that the concept about differences in the ideologies of the first and the tenth Master is a figment of later arm-chair or partisan writers unknown to the Sikhs or people of the earlier centuries. Banda Bahadur's seal also depicted similar thought i.e., "Degh-the kettle for service, Tegh, the strength of the sword arm, and Fateh, the resultant victory, received by Guru Gobind Singh from Guru Nanak." <sup>20</sup>

Under Banda's inspiration, Sikhism became popular with the people of Punjab. About one lac persons embraced Sikhism. Banda and several Hundred soldiers of the Khalsa army who were arrested, kept their cool even in the face of death. None of them renounced his faith to "Save his life." <sup>21</sup> They carried on the glorious traditions of sacrifice and martyrdom for the cause of righteousness handed down to them by the Gurus. Their blood created fertile soil for sprouting the seeds of Sikh glory. The Sikhs confronted the hordes of Persian and Afghan invaders with the same religious spirit. This was a time when a price was put on every Sikh head and thrice it was reported to the authorities that the Sikhs had been exterminated root and branch. <sup>22</sup> The imperial order for the elimination of Sikhs was directed at the destruction of the Nanakpathis. <sup>23</sup> It did not declare them as Sikhs or Singhs or the Khalsa. This clearly indicated that there was no question of any multiple identities among the Sikhs in the eighteenth century. The clear teachings of the ten gurus and the fire of suffering and persecution had welded the Sikhs with a unity of ideals, ethos and practices entirely different from those of the Hindu society with which they were surrounded. The Bani and the Nash doctrine created the wall of division between them, and persecution and suffering cemented the internal cohesion of the community as a distinct society. For the followers of the Gurus and their opponents, there was only one community of Nanakpanthis, Sikhs or Khalsa whose sole



founder was Guru Nanak. The definition of a Sikh was very clear, without any scope for ambiguity. There was no question of any multiple identities among the Sikhs.

After a long period of turmoil, suffering and persecution, the Sikhs rose to political power under Ranjit Singh, who ruled under the banner of Sarkar-i-Khalsa. It was at this time that Hindus swelled the ranks of the Khalsa in the hope of temporal gains. The population of the Sikhs, which at one time was reported to be not more than twenty thousand in the 18th century now rose to the peak figure of 10-11 lacs in the times of Ranjit Singh.<sup>24</sup> It was not so easy for these converts of convenience to shed some of their beliefs and practices. Ranjit Singh had to spend most of his time in conquering and consolidating territories. The result was that the Sikhs had hardly any time to set their house in order. It is evident that the large scale increase in the Sikh population was due to the new entrants who had flocked to the new faith not out of conviction but to put up an appearance of closer ties with the people in power.<sup>25</sup> There began a new phase of Sikhism with new entrants to the Sikh fold. Their ways and customs were still overlaid with Hinduism. It was very easy for them to slide back into their old faith when power did not rest with the community. This was the first time in their history that the Sikhs could be divided into two categories, the first consisting of those who nursed their traditional culture and carried in them the spirit to suffer and sacrifice for a righteous cause and the second comprising the new lot with hardly any strong commitment to the faith. During the Guru and the post-Guru period there is no evidence, whatsoever, of the so called multiple identities'. During the phase of struggle and persecution in the 18th century, when to be a Sikh was to invite death, the Sikhs never had any ambiguity about their identity or ideals created by the ten Nanaks. And both for the insiders and outsiders there was a single community of society they had created. They kept the torch of Sikhism ablaze through tremendous suffering and sacrifice.

*Post-Annexation Period :-* With the fall of the Sikh kingdom, the new entrants to the Sikh fold started wavering in their loyalty to Sikhism. The Sikhs had hardly had peace for one generation, some of these new entrants reverted to Hinduism and its old prejudices and practices.<sup>26</sup> Still there were many for whom the border line between Hinduism and Sikhism became very thin and

vague and they kept unsurely on the border line between Sikhism and Hinduism. In their outlook, character and behaviour they stood dearly apart from the main segment of the Sikh society who had a clear identity. The latter traced their lineage from the Guru period and had inherited the glorious tradition of martyrdom for the cause of righteousness. With the emergence of the British as the new rulers, the relationships between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs underwent a complete change. In Punjab the Hindus, who had looked upon the Sikhs as their protectors against the Muslims and were partners in power during the years of triumphs under Ranjit Singh, showed hardly any commitment towards Sikhism that had successfully fought battles for liberty and freedom of the land and its people. With both the Muslim threat and the Sikh kingdom gone, the external pressures that had held them seemingly close to Sikhism disappeared. They had to redefine their mutual relationship. Apart from this, the role of some members of the Hindu elites during the period of annexation, a point which we shall detail later on, was far from creditable and created some gap between the two communities. It is note-worthy that the Hindu Dogras and Purbias during the crucial Anglo-Sikh wars deserted the Khalsa army. On the other hand, the Muslim part of the Khalsa army fought against the 'British till the end.'<sup>27</sup> Tears at the defeat of Sarkar-i-Khalsa were shed by Shah Muhammad, the celebrated Muslim poet.

The British looked upon the Sikhs as enemies and initiated a policy aimed at the suppression of the 'War-like Sikhs', with the help of an army of occupation comprising 60,000 soldiers and a police force of 15,000, largely manned by the Punjabi Muslims.<sup>28</sup> Special precautions were taken in policing the Majha area, where Bhai Mehraj Singh and Narain Singh were reported to be active.<sup>29</sup> The royal house of the Sikhs was completely destroyed. It is well known that Maharani Jindan, called the "mother of the Khalsa" whom the British considered to be the root cause of all trouble was treated very shabbily and was forced to leave the country.<sup>30</sup> The minor Maharaja Dalip Singh was made to resign "for himself, his heirs and successors, all rights, title and claim to the sovereignty of the Punjab or to any sovereign power whatever."<sup>31</sup> The 'Koh-i-Noor', considered by Dalhousie as a historical emblem of conquest in India, was presented to the Queen of England.<sup>32</sup>

The Government confiscated all the valuables, including the antiques of the Sikh Raj from the Toshakhana of the Maharaja and

also the estates of all those chiefs who had fought against the British in the two Anglo-Sikh Wars.<sup>33</sup> Some of them were exiled from Punjab and others were kept under surveillance in their own houses. They were not allowed to keep arms in their possession.<sup>34</sup> Forts and defensive fortifications- practically every Sikh village had defensive bastions-were levelled. All military grants to the Sikh Jagirdars were abolished.<sup>35</sup> Henry Lawrence, as head of the Board of Control, responsible for the administration of Punjab, recommended slight leniency towards the Sikh nobility. He thought and argued that it was most impolitic and dangerous to deprive them of their rights unfairly. But, he was overruled by Governor General Dalhousie, who in pursuance of his imperialistic policies, thought that the "Jagirdars deserved little but maintenance,"<sup>36</sup> Henry Lawrence tendered his resignation over this issue.

Nearly 50,000 Sikh soldiers were disbanded.<sup>37</sup> Hardly a tenth of the old army of Punjab was taken into the British pay. Although the term 'Sikh' was used for the re-employed soldiers, few were in fact Sikhs. They were largely Punjabi Muslims, Gurkhas and Hindustanis of the Durbar army. The British officers looked upon the Sikh soldiers with suspicion. They were called, "dirty sepoys"<sup>38</sup> and many officers wished them to cut their hair" forgetting that the very essence of Sikhism lies in its locks.<sup>39</sup> D. Petrie, an Assistant Director, Criminal Intelligence, Government of India, in a Confidential report on the 'Development of Sikh Politics (1900-1911)', wrote:

"The British adopted a very strict and rigid policy detrimental to the growth of Sikhism. After annexation, the Golden Temple Amritsar, alongwith 6 other Gurdwaras and the Gurdawara at Tarn Taran were practically controlled by the British authorities through a Manager of these Gurdwaras appointed by the British Government. The waqf Act of 1861 gave the control and Management of the holy places of the Hindus and Muslims to the communities concerned but in the case of the Sikh Gurdwaras, the Act was not applied on political grounds. The properties of Sikh places of worship were transferred and given over to the Udasi Mahants and others, throughout the Punjab"<sup>40</sup> A significant blow was given by the British to the Sikh religion when they conferred proprietary rights to the temple Mahants, Brahmins, Udasis or Nirmalas,<sup>41</sup> most of whom had Hindu leanings and hardly understood or had faith in the Sikh religion and its practices. This

was- an extremely subtle method by which the British sought to secure the undoing of the ideological base of the Sikhs. A committee of nine Sikhs with a Government nominated Sarbrah or Warden as its head was appointed. After 1883, however, the Committee was quietly dropped and the whole control came to be vested in the Sarbarah who received his instructions from the Deputy Commissioner.<sup>42</sup> The government wanted to maintain the Gurdwaras as channels of indirect control of Sikhs.

The British rule dealt a severe blow to the socio-economic condition of the Sikhs. Thousands of Sikh soldiers were rendered jobless. Because of earlier wars and consequent disturbances, the lot of the peasantry was no better. Instead of the Sikhs, Hindus were preferred in the civil services. Most of the jobs in military and police were given to the Punjabi Muslims. Out of the eleven Extra Assistant Commissioners, appointed by the Board of Control, only one was a Sikh.<sup>43</sup>

The Christian Missions which came to be established in Punjab, also generated a feeling of hatred and hostility towards the Sikhs. The Charter granted in 1600 by Queen Elizabeth of England to a Colonising Company spoke of "duties higher than those of Commerce."<sup>44</sup> If merchants must buy and sell, they must also convert. Religious imperialism was the first phase of British Colonial imperialism. Christian Missions worked under British political wings. The Missionaries established their centres at Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Batala,<sup>45</sup> Ludhiana and Lahore,<sup>46</sup> Many Sikh students studying in Missionary schools began to despise the religion of their forefathers.<sup>47</sup> Some of them cut their hair and beards. The conversions of Maharaja Dalip Singh and Raja Harnam Singh of Kapurthala were serious and deliberate blows at the roots of the community. Further, the growing success of Missionaries in their evangelical work, with the support of the Government, was an overt measure against the Sikhs. Sir John Lawrence used to make annual contribution of Rupees five hundred towards missionary activities.<sup>49</sup> Some of the Misssionaries openly condemned the Sikh institutions, tradition and Gurus. They called the Guru Granth a "heathen scripture."<sup>50</sup> The Administrative Report (1849-51) noted: "The Sikh faith and ecclesiastical policy is rapidly going where Sikh political ascendancy has already gone... These men joined (Sikhism) in thousands and they now desert in equal numbers... The sacred tank of Amritsar is less thronged than formerly, and the attendance at annual festivals is diminishing

yearly, Initiatory ceremony for adult persons is now rarely performed .... Gurmukhi is rapidly falling into desuetude. The punjabi as a spoken language is also losing its currency and degenerating into a merely provincial and rustic dialect.”<sup>51</sup> A series of discreditable manoeuvres, interference with the local customs, feverish activity of the Christian missions and the attempts to westernise the Sikh culture filled the Sikhs with alarm.

*Sikhs and Mutiny:-* During the Mutiny of 1857, the Muslims sought the restoration of the rule of Muslim princes and rulers and the Hindus hoped to put the Maratha rulers back into power. The princes of the two communities had a unity of purpose in putting up a common front against a common enemy, the British. Because of the earlier British repression of the Sikhs, they were too disorganised to think of putting up a united leadership to reclaim their lost kingdom. The community was leaderless.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the situation in the Punjab was quite different from the one that prevailed in the rest of India. An important and the main factor was that the Sikhs had nursed a serious grudge against the Purbias who, despite the Sikhs having never given them any cause for offence, had by their betrayal and other overt and covert acts, helped the British during the Anglo-Sikh Wars and later in the annexation of Punjab. The British used the Sikh grievance and consequent “natural hatred” towards the Purbias. Kavi Khazan Singh in his work, ‘Jangnama Dilli’, written in 1858, mentions that the Sikh participation against the Purbia soldiers was in reaction to their boast that they had vanquished the Sikhs in 1845-46 and in 1848-49.<sup>53</sup> Another contemporary observer noted: “The animosity between the Sikhs and the Poorbiahs is notorious. The former gave out that they would not allow the latter to pass through their country. It was, therefore, determined to take advantage of this ill-feeling and to stimulate it by the offer of rewards for every Hindoostanee sepoy who should be captured.”<sup>54</sup> The bitter memories of Purbia cooperation with the British were so fresh in minds of the Sikhs that any coalition between the two became impossible. The people who now claimed to be fighters for freedom were the same who, eight years earlier, had actively helped the British to usurp Sikh sovereignty. The pleas of Purbias were so hollow and incongruous with their earlier conduct that they fell on deaf ears of the aggrieved Punjabi Sikhs and Muslims whose independence they had helped the British to rob. Besides it is a well-accepted view that the risings in 1857 were just revolts by the

princes to regain their feudal or territorial rights. It was far from being any ideological struggle or for any common Indian interest. In this context, the Sikhs in the background of their rule in Punjab and egalitarian tradition could hardly be expected to side with Muslim and Hindu princes to regain their kingdoms, nor could religious taboos which affected Hindu and Muslim sentiments, against many of which the Sikh Gurus had led a crusade, could in any measure inflame Sikh sentiments. It was on account of all this that the Punjab was not affected by the rebellion which convulsed the rest of northern India. Punjabi Mussalmans turned a deaf ear to their Hindustani co-religionists' exhortation of 'jihad' against the pig-eating despoilers of Islam. Punjabi Hindus and, with greater reason, the Sikhs refused to listen to the belated appeal to save Hindu Dharma from beef-eating foreigners who used cow to grease their cartridges.<sup>55</sup> However, there were stray cases of Sikhs joining the mutineers. It was reported that a large number of Sikhs gathered at Ropar and declared the Khalsa Raj for which the leader of the band was immediately put to death. A Sikh Chief Raja Nahar Singh was executed for supporting the cause of the rebels. After annexation Bhai Maharaj Singh had moved from village to village in Majha region and incited the people to rebel.<sup>56</sup>

The Cis-Satluj chiefs of Patiala, Malerkotla, Kalsia, Nabha, Faridkot and Jind, along with their mercenary forces, rendered full help to the British in suppressing the rebellion. These chiefs owed their existence to the British and were always outside the main Punjab, being hostile to Ranjit Singh. They still remembered with gratitude the support extended to them by the British against Maharaja Ranjit Singh. But for the British protection, Ranjit Singh would have overpowered them long ago. The British had guaranteed them full protection ever since the proclamation of 1809 (Treaty of Amritsar). Very few scholars have studied the role of the Sikhs in the Mutiny in its true historical perspective. In the opinion of M.A. Rahim: "Disarmament of people, dismantling of fortifications, disbanding of the Khalsa Army, suppression of the Sikh gentry, stationing of a large army and police in the Punjab and various other measures were taken to cow down the brave militant and turbulent Khalsa nation into humble submission...so that the Khalsa may not be allowed to recover its prestige and reconstitute its army."<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Evans Bell believes that the Khalsa was bound to feel discomfited for their Gurus had been discredited and their union had been dissolved.<sup>58</sup>

Although the Mutiny did not spread to Punjab, the British did not look upon the Sikhs as trustworthy. They knew that Punjab was still seething with disaffection. Therefore, they kept a strict vigil over their fallen enemies. A big force consisting of 60,000 soldiers and 15,000 police personnel was stationed in Punjab to exercise control in the event of an emergency. There was one soldier for every forty persons. Thus, peace in Punjab was preserved at the point of bayonet. A Government report of this time noted: "A spirit of nationality and military ambition still survives in the minds and hearts of thousands among Sikhs. It was vain to suppose that thoughts of future triumphs and future independence did not cross the imagination of these people or that aspirations of restoring the Khalsa Raj were not excited during the summer of 1857. Universal revolt in the Punjab would have broken out if Delhi had not fallen soon into our hands."<sup>59</sup> Despite recruitment from Punjab during and after the revolt, the total number of Sikh soldiers by May 1858 stood at 13,344 as against 20,027 Mohammandans.<sup>60</sup>

As detailed above, it is evident that the Sikh soldiers who had joined the British army in 1857 were, by and large, drawn from the Cis-Satluj states, whose rulers during Ranjit Singh's rule owed their very existence to British bayonets and who even during the Anglo-Sikh wars were obviously sympathetic to the British and not to the Sikhs. In fact, the Sikhs of Punjab were virtually segregated from the rest of India by the intervening Cis-Satluj states and the adjacent Hill and Dogra rulers, who had been traditionally pro-Delhi. So far as the Hill-Rajas were concerned their hostility towards the Gurus and the Sikhs dated from the Mughal period.

*British Policy after Mutiny :-* With the transfer of authority from the East India Company to the Crown, it had become the declared policy of the British to give due respect to the religious sensibilities of each community, to raise army regiments on communal lines to ensure that every community, and not the Sikh community alone, observed its separate religious discipline. The Immediate cause leading to the Mutiny had been the greased cartndges smeared with the fat of cows and swines. This had outraged the feelings of both Hindus, to whom the cow was sacred, and Muslims for whom the swine was unclean. The British Government had learnt a good lesson, and its policy, in reference to Indian religions was radically altered. While deciding to raise regiments on communal lines, the British also kept in view the prejudice of the caste Hindus, especially in matters pertaining to

eating from a common mess and living together under the same roof in the military barracks. Government not only maintained the religious identity of the units but also respected the religious taboos of the soldiers, and even allowed each Brahmin to cook his food separately.<sup>61</sup>

In the new native army the number of high castes was reduced. A soldier in each regiment was required to take oath of allegiance on his respective scripture by the help of his own priest at his own place of worship. Soldiers were allowed to use their Own communal war-cries. This new policy was in no way designed to further one religion at the cost of the other. A notable decision was taken to reduce the number of native sepoys in the Indian army and to increase the strength of the European soldiers. There was an overall decrease of 40 per cent in the total strength of the native soldiers but an increase of 60 per cent in the number of European troops. It was an established principle of the British policy for the period since 1858 that the native troops should not exceed more than 40 per cent of the total army.

Many scholars like Fox, Mcleod, Rajiv Kapur and Barrier have wrongly highlighted the recruiting policy of the British in maintaining religious neutrality and freedom, as if this policy had only related to the Sikhs. ,Actually as we have stated, it was a general policy regarding the maintenance of religious neutrality and status quo concerning each community. It is, therefore, incorrect that the British policy either in any manner related only to the Sikhs, or that it had introduced any religious practice that had not been in existence earlier in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is, therefore, an idle prejudice to suggest that the British' chose any particular or Khalsa identity. In relation to every community the British accepted what was the authentic and the typical. In fact, any partiality or prejudice in the choice of any sect would unnecessarily have raised criticism, which the British wanted to avoid, being contrary to their new religious policy of neutrality. Here it is relevant to give the statement of Henry Lawrence quoted by Barrier in his article, 'The Punjab Government and Communal Politics, 1870-1908': "My men are expected to extend equal rights to all native religions and to align with none."<sup>62</sup>On the basis of the above statement and other facts Barrier concludes that "the first Punjab administration thus responded to a communal problem with religious impartiality."<sup>63</sup> In fact the burden of his entire article is to suggest British neutrality towards different religious communities



in Punjab and defend them against the charge of creating communal divisions. It is difficult to understand what climatic change has occurred or interests have over-weighed with the same author that later he writes that, "that British also played an important role by supporting the maintenance of separate Sikh identity for military purposes."<sup>64</sup> Because, it is normally unusual for an author to give on the one hand a clean chit to the British for their avowed and practical neutrality towards the three communities in Punjab, and, on the other hand, strongly to endorse the oft-repeated charge of Hindu politicians that the Hindu-Sikh divide in Punjab is a British creation to serve their partisan interests. Besides, this religious policy regarding various communities had been formulated by the British long before the publication of pamphlets by the Singh Sabha at the fag end of the 19th century. Here it is very important to mention that the British religious policies regarding communal practices in the army were strictly governed by their own self-interest" so as to maintain the loyalty of the soldiers. The important and authentic fact is that both for the Muslim rulers of the 16th to 18th centuries and the British rulers of the 19th century, there was only one reality or identity, namely the Sikhs, Nanakpanthis or Khalsa with which they battled or dealt with. Any other identity existed neither in the field of religion, society, politics nor even in fiction or imagination. The religious realities the British found, were dealt with uniformly by their new religious policy; they did not choose anyone, ignore any one, or promote anyone. It is only the split vision of some interested modern writers that raises the phantoms of plural images that for the rulers and historians of the times were non-existent.

But the British knew full well that the centres of Sikh strength and inspiration were their scripture, ideology and Gurdwaras. In fact, the British were very vigilant and particular in ensuring that the Sikh Gurdwaras were kept in the hands of the Hindu Mahants and Pujaris so that the Sikhs who were traditionally known to draw their religious vigour, vitality and inspiration from their ideology and holy places, some of which associated with the martyrdoms and struggles of the Gurus against the rulers, were, through the Government policy and their appointed managers, segregated from their glorious tradition and corrupted ideologically.

Recruitment to the army was made, keeping in view, the qualities of hne physique and a military background and tradition.

The British, no doubt, had preference for martial races but the Sikhs were not the only martial race recruited in the Indian army. There were many Muslim tribes and Hindu castes like the Pathans and Dogra Rajputs with martial traditions, who provided good recruiting grounds for the British. This is amply borne out by a contemporary report in the Army Book:-

“At present the Sikhs, together with the other inhabitants of the Punjab, whether Hindu, as the Dogra (Rajputs), or Mohammandan as the Punjabi Mussalmans, and the Pathan Musulmans, the latter being descendents of Afghan or other Asiatic invaders of India, are reckoned among our best and most willing soldiers.”<sup>65</sup> *M.s. Leigh observes*:- “Although the Sikhs produced a percentage of recruits during the First World War greatly in excess of their percentage in the population of Punjab, the fact remains that out of the 370,609 combatants recruited from Punjab, 190,078 (51.4%) were Moslems and “only” 97,016 (26%) were Sikhs.”<sup>66</sup>

In fact, the lower Hindu contribution to recruits is not due to any selective policy of the Government but is due to the Hindu population in Punjab being largely urban and well-off in trading and business and, for that matter, being reluctant by tradition to accept risks and hazards of a military career.

*Attack on Sikh Identity:* The Government of India Act of 1858, which transferred the authority from the East India Company to the Crown brought the Sikhs directly under the Imperial rule. After the loss of political power, a sense of despair pervaded the Sikh society. An editorial in the Khalsa Advocate sums up the situation.

“False Gurus grew up in great numbers whose only business was to fleece their flock and pamper their own self-aggrandisement. Properly speaking, there was no Sikhism. Belief in the Gurus was gone. The idea of brotherhood in Panth was discarded.”<sup>67</sup>

Under the circumstances the discerning Sikh mind knew full well that while the chances of engaging themselves successfully in a political battle with the British were slim, it was essential to invoke and strengthen its religious base which was their very source of zeal and vigour.

Advent of Christian missions and spread of western education and science also provoked self-understanding. Naturally, the Sikh mind looked back on its history and ideology with a clear self-discerning eye.

The ideologically and politically conscious wing of the Sikhs was being calculatedly curbed and kept under virtual surveillance. It was a tremendous task to revive the purity of the Sikh doctrine and to rid the faith and its institutions of wrong accretions and adulterations in order to maintain their independence. It was under great difficulties that the Sikhs started their struggle for survival in the mid-nineteenth century. They rightly realised that before they could consciously and usefully start any political struggle with the British masters, they had to revive and reinvigorate their religious understanding and discipline. Like the Sikh Gurus, who had undone the social and religious trammels of Hindu dogmatism and created new motivations and traditions in the Sikh society before preparing and taking up the struggle against political oppression, the Sikhs at this time decided first to reinforce their socio-religious base and strength before taking up the political challenges.

Contrary to what is generally imagined, the fall of the Sikh kingdom was an episode in the turbulent history of the Sikhs, rather than the close of an epoch. The proudest outcome of the apparent disaster was that it forced Sikhism to exist on the strength of its own ideology and tradition. The period between 1849 and the rise of Singh Sabha was a time of acute pain, trauma, distress, confusion and even of some despair in the Sikh society, which had altogether to face multifarious problems. The British were too conscious to ignore the political potential of their foe that had given them the greatest challenge. Obviously, they were keen that the political objectives of the community should be kept permanently frustrated. For this end, they had taken away and converted the Sikh Maharaja Dalip Singh and virtually exiled the entire family of Ranjit Singh. Similarly, the principal political Sardars were also curbed or hunted out. Such a thing for an erstwhile victor was natural to do and the Sikhs, had no illusions in this regard. The British knew very well that the entire vigour and strength of the Sikhs lay in their religious zeal and it was their religion from which they derived their entire inspiration and power. Therefore, with their uncanny understanding they made sure that the Sikh religious places were kept in hands that were hostile to the thesis of the Gurus and sought to divert them to the ritualistic maze of Hinduism.<sup>68</sup>

The contrast is very significant, whereas the British restored the territory and kingdoms of princes and persons who had

revolted during the British rule, they made sure that none from the family of the Maharaja or the Sikh Sardars were allowed to have an opportunity to regain the leadership of the Khalsa because in the case of the Sikhs, they knew, they were dealing not with individuals, but with a people or a nation imbued with an ideology of liberty and independence. The Sikh princes kept were those who had always been non-leaders of the community and outside the pale of Sarkar-i-Khalsa.

The second part of the attack on Sikh religion was the arrival of Christian missionaries in the heart of Central Punjab under the political wings of the British. Their activities and propaganda as already indicated were significantly subversive to the Sikh religion. In fact, the Missionaries sought in every way to facilitate the colonial expansion of Britain by objectively acting as agents for their country's big capital. They were often unofficial consuls. Third is the process and thinking that starts at the time of a ship feared to be sinking. As the bulk of converts of convenience were from Hinduism, most of whom had neither shed their old practices and prejudices nor their socio-ritual connections with their parent community, they started reversion to that fold as also revival of their affinities with the Hindus. That this trend took the form of a serious attack on Sikhism is evident from the virulent activities of Pt. Sharda Ram Phillauri a top Sanatanist Hindu leader considered to be an agent of the British. He spoke even from the precincts of Darbar Sahib,<sup>69</sup> with the cooperation of British nominees in charge of it. With the rise of Arya Samaj, it also started propaganda against the Sikh religion and vicious personal attacks on the Gurus. Phillauri delivered a series of lectures at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, in which he made disparaging remarks against all the Sikh Gurus<sup>70</sup> He also published a book entitled *Sikhan De Raj Di Vithya*, in which he misinterpreted the teachings of the Sikh Gurus<sup>71</sup> The book was prescribed in the Oriental College, Lahore, as a subject of study.<sup>72</sup> Such distorted accounts of Sikhism and Sikh history undermined the prestige of the community. And all this could not happen without the British patronage. Though the British were on the one hand claiming a policy of neutrality towards Indian religions, they were fully and approvingly aware of this multi-pronged attack on the Sikh source of strength, their religious places and ideology.

The reality is that both the Mughal and the British rulers were well aware of this intimate connection between the life-affirming

moral zeal of the Sikhs and their religion and places of worship. In the past too, with this awareness<sup>73</sup> in mind, the Afghan invaders led by Ahmed Shah Abdali sought to destroy Darbar Sahib and fill its sacred tank<sup>74</sup>. Similarly, Massa Rangar tried to have his indulgent orgies at the sacred precincts of this centre of Sikhism<sup>75</sup>. The British also tried to weaken the religious base of the Sikh community by extending support to the pro-Hindu Mahants and Pujaris of the Sikh temples<sup>76</sup>.

In the beginning of 1873 four Sikh students of the Mission High School, Amritsar, under the influence of the Missionaries, offered themselves to be converted to Christianity.<sup>77</sup> There were protest meetings all over the province and prominent Sikh leaders persuaded the boys not to abandon their faith. But the incident served as an eye-opener to the Sikhs. Sikhism, at this time, came under severe attack. In this state of affairs the traditional Sikh ethos was bound to react.

*Birth of Singh Sabha* :- With a view to mustering forces for an all round Panthic upliftment, some prominent Sikhs including Harsha Singh Dhupia, Thakur Singh Sandhwalia, Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi and Raja Bikram Singh Kapurthala, convened a meeting in Amritsar in July, 1873. The meeting was attended by leading Sikh chiefs, Sardars, Gianis, Pujaris and Mahants of the Sikh Gurdwaras of Amritsar and the adjoining districts.<sup>78</sup> The new association, Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Amritsar, was formed on July 28, 1873.<sup>79</sup> The object of the Singh Sabha was to take up social, religious and educational programmes.<sup>80</sup> But most of the leaders of the Amritsar Singh Sabha being drawn from the rich, the upper, the privileged and the British supported strata of the Sikh society, were not ready to shed their old prejudices against the low-caste Sikhs. They sided with the Mahants and Pujaris in discriminating against them. This created a gulf between the high and the low-caste Sikhs and, thus, the movement failed to gain the support of the masses because this behaviour of the Mahants and Pujaris was clearly contrary to the basic tenets and practice of Sikhism.<sup>81</sup> Baba Khem Singh Bedi tried to wield absolute control over the activities of the Sabha. Being a direct descendent of Guru Nanak, he aspired for reverence due to a Guru and claimed some privileges. His followers called him *avtar* (Incarnation of God).<sup>82</sup> He wanted a well-furnished seat (*gudela*) for himself even in the presence of the Holy Granth.<sup>83</sup> This shocked the Sikh feelings.<sup>84</sup>

The Amritsar group adopted and approved anti-Sikh

practices like discrimination, and personal worship, and made ideological distortions.<sup>85</sup> Naturally, persons conversant with the Sikh tradition objected to all such aberrations resulting in a schism and formation of the Lahore Singh Sabha in November 1879.<sup>86</sup> It is significant to say that the chief organisers of this Sabha were devoted Sikhs with humble beginnings, whereas the Amritsar Group was clearly British backed. The Lahore Singh Sabha developed a broad and comprehensive outlook, making no distinction between the high and low-caste Sikhs and extending its activities both to the urban and rural masses of Punjab. They preached and practised Sikh value system as required by the Guru Granth. They strongly opposed the institution of human worship and regarded all men as equals.<sup>87</sup> They judged a man by his worth and not by his birth. Bhai Gurmukh Singh made an appeal to the Sikhs of all castes and classes, to enlist themselves as volunteers of the newly formed Sabha and to carry its message to every nook and corner of the Punjab.<sup>88</sup>

The religious revival under Singh Sabha was a protest against forms and ceremonies and class distinctions based on birth. It was ethical in its preference for a pure heart, the law of love, and good works. This religious revival was the work of the people, of the masses, and not of the classes. At its head were leaders like Ditt Singh, Gurmukh Singh and others, who sprang chiefly from the lower orders of the society- Ramdasias, weavers, cooks, clerks, shopkeepers, peasants rather than the gilded gentry. Thus, the gulf between the privileged and the British-backed, and the Sikh oriented groups started and continued. And, it is this basic difference which some of the scholars ignore.

Whereas the appeal of the Amritsar Singh Sabha was mostly confined to the personal pockets of influence of its leaders, that of the Lahore Singh Sabha went further and touched the hearts of the general mass of the community. Lahore party sent its *Parcharaks* (preachers) even in the interior of the State to spread the message of Sikhism among hundreds and thousands of the village folks, who constituted the backbone of the Sikh community and without whose cooperation no movement could acquire a mass base. Simultaneously, the Lahore Singh Sabha opened branches in many towns. By 1882, the Singh Sabhas sprang up at places like Peshawar, Bannu, Kohat, Ebetabad, Jullundur, Gujranwala, Lyallpur, Patiala Simla, Jhelum, Ludhiana, Ambala, Quetta, Multan and Jind.<sup>89</sup> Lahore Singh Sabha served as a model for all

these Sabhas. Since the Lahore Singh Sabha was working in line with the Sikh tradition and the Amritsar Singh Sabha was concerned only in maintaining their own personal position and privileges, very soon, except for three Singh Sabhas, all rural and urban Singh Sabhas joined the Lahore Sabha.<sup>90</sup>

McLeod calls the section of the Singh Sabha that promoted the Sikh identity the “Stronger” one. This statement begs the question. The real question to answer, which McLeod avoids, is why it proved to be the stronger, the better and the wiser leadership. For there is no reason to assume that the Lahore Singh Sabha was in material respects more influential. In fact from the angle of social status, and available resources, the Lahore Singh Sabhaites were men of meagre means and belonged to the lowest class and castes. On the other hand the Amritsar Singh Sabha belonged to the gilded gentry including Knights and Princes, who looked to the British as their masters. Thus, if the British had their way they would have their designs executed through their own and rich loyalists who looked up to them both for their gained, strength and future prospects. By none of the normal socio-economic factors can the Lahore Singh Sabha be called the stronger one. What McLeod seems to conceal by calling them stronger is the moral strength and sap which they drew from the Guru Granth and the lives of the Gurus. Hence McLeod’s own reluctant admission of the strength of the Lahore Singh Sabha demolishes the very basis of his argument that the Sikh identity which the Lahore party espoused was either a created or a planted one, or not the only original one. McLeod seems to conceal the fact, of which he could not be unaware, that originally the only Singh Sabha with all its branches was headed by the rich and gilded gentry. It is later that, on ideological grounds, some junior and unprivileged members broke away from it and formed the Lahore Singh Sabha.

No political, economic or social factor in any sense contributed to its growth and spread except its ability to invoke the Sikh doctrines in the Guru Granth. It is still later that all except three branches of the old Singh Sabha shifted their affiliation from the old to the new Singh Sabha. We do not think it is fair for a scholar to suppress or omit such a fact and to suggest to the reader that the British supported the Lahore Singh Sabha because it was the stronger one. The Lahore Sabha’s appeal to the masses lay in the Sikh doctrines and not in any material, British or social factor. It appears the author has been unable to shed the conditioned bias

that is naturally associated with long years of functioning in Chirstian organisations in Punjab.

Again, there arose a schism in the first meeting of the newly constituted Khalsa Diwan (on April 11, 1883), when Baba Khem Singh Bedi suggested that the title of the Singh Sabha should be changed to Sikh Singh Sabhas.<sup>91</sup> The object was to include the *Sehjdhari* Sikhs. But the proposal was considered motivated, being only a method to include under this garb Hindu followers of the gilded Bedis, making regular offerings to them. .It was straight away opposed and rejected outright. At this time, these Bedis alongwith Thakur Singh Sandhawalia and their followers were inspired by their personal interests.<sup>92</sup> As things were, it would have been naive to hope that any worthwhile political rebellion could be organised in the State. For, the British with their experience of 1857 were quite cautious and alert, and they sent back Dalip Singh from Aden.

The Lahore leaders strictly wanted to adhere to the Sikh ideology as enjoined in the Guru Granth and practised in the tradition. The Baba desired to assume the role of a spiritual guide and the Raja aspired to become the temporal head of the whole community.<sup>93</sup> Baba was, therefore, ready to allow some laxity in maintaining the five symbols.<sup>94</sup> The Lahore group maintained that Sikhism was as proclaimed by the Guru Granth, the Gurus and the Sikh tradition. They laid emphasis on *Rehat* perscribed by the Tenth Guru. They did not tolerate any attempted ideological compromise with Hinduism.<sup>95</sup>

The activities of the Singh Sabha were focussed on the deprecation of un-Sikh like customs and social evils and the encouragement of modern education. The revivalist impulse stirred the Sikhs to an awareness of their faith and impelled them to resuscitate the essential cbntents of Sikh beliefs. It was a trying time for the Sikhs, because their religion was under serious attack from the resurgent Arya Samaj section of the Hindus.<sup>96</sup> In this context, the move of the Amritsar Singh Sabha to own and promote Hindu practices among their followers had to be repelled as a serious departure from the Sikh tradition. Hence, Singh Sabha had to fight on many fronts, against the Arya Samaj, against the Chirstain missionaries, against the British-backed elite of their own community, and against the corruption of the British patronised Mahants and Pujaris who prtctised anti-Sikh rites at the sacred Sikh shrines. The Sikh literature was collected, scanned, edited and



compiled. Amongst these was Bhai Kahn Singh's well-known work 'Mahan Kosh' and the 'Ham Hindu Nahin' (Sikhs are not Hindus) as a rejoinder to the Arya Samaj propaganda that the Sikhs were Hindus.

The British government at this time was also ready to encourage freedom of thought, ideas of reforms on modern lines and even social revolt so long as these did not touch the dangerous ground of politics."<sup>97</sup> The Government appreciated the division of people's attention from politics to religious and social reform. It refrained from adopting any such policy as would further antagonise the Sikhs, arouse their military instincts and remind them of their lost glory. The following remarks of Lord Lawrence are note-worthy in this connection: "The Sikhs were the bravest and the most chivalrous race in India and they now seemed disposed to submit with manly self-restraint to our superior power, if only we use it with equity and toleration."<sup>98</sup>

The British were extra cautious in dealing with the Sikhs and this is borne by observaion of Sir Richard Temple: "Sikhism" though quiet and loyal at present, is one of those inflammable things of which a spark might kindle into a flame. Its idiosyncrasy and susceptibilities are thoroughly understood by the Punjab authorities and its fidelity to the Empire is well preserved. It would stand proof against many trials and temptations, but if tried over much, it would re-assert itself and would assume the leadership of a national movement."<sup>99</sup> This emphasizes two important realities of the day. First, that Sikhism was not an amorphous, ambiguous or confused and dispersed reality. Because of its ideology and a community having been welded into a society of religious heroes, and its'history of suffering and martyrdoms, under the severest trials, it was a society with the greatest potential. This is the assessment of an important erstwhile adversary. Secondly, his objective which is clear enough, is to see that the enormous poten tial does not get to be used or exploited against them. For that matter, while it was natural, as we shall see, for the adversary slowly to erode that potential, Temple suggests that it would be unwise unnecessarily to provoke the Sikhs regarding minor issues, lest the inflammable material should explode against them Accordingly, it would be naive for any historian not to understand the British policies and the course of events or ignore the assessment of the Chief British actors of the times.

Sir Richard Temple's expression of British policy is extremely

revealing of the British mind. So far as the Sikhs were concerned they very well understood the natural and logical basis of that policy, namely, that while the British would not mind helping and placating the Sikhs on minor and non-essential issues, they would never tolerate any sufferance of their political interests. It is for this reason that both the Singh Sabhas had incorporated a clause in their constitution that they would not indulge in political matters.

*Political Suppression of the Sikhs:* The last quarter of the nineteenth century was primarily devoted to reviving the strength of the community by educating them in their religion and tradition. The main emphasis was in social and religious fields. Having discreetly reconstructed these aspects of the Sikh society, slowly and surely the Singh Sabha Movement took up the political problems as well. With the formation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902, there came a significant change in the attitude of the Singh Sabha leaders towards politics. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the rising tide of political consciousness and the new born awareness arising from the regeneration brought about by the Singh Sabha movement, prompted the leaders of the Chief Khalsa Diwan to play their role in the political life of the province. They took it upon themselves “to safeguard the political rights of the Sikhs.”<sup>100</sup>

The passing of the Universities Act, in 1904, which required greater official control over the management of the Khalsa College, Amritsar, made the Diwan leaders sceptical of British intentions.<sup>101</sup> Even the proposal of the Government to give an annual grant of rupees ten thousand to the College, which provided that the constitution of the managing body was to be main tined according to the wishes of the Government, was viewed to be fraught with mischief. In 1907, a fresh controversy erupted when the Government forced Sardar Dharam Singh, who was working in an honorary capacity as the Engineer-in-charge of the college, to be replaced by a European engineer, Major Hill. The College Managing Comittee dissociated itself from the activities of this Government appointed Engineer. This resulted in a direct confrontation between the College Governing Council and the Government. *The Panjab*, Lahore, in its issue dated May I, 1908, observed: “one can imagine the plight of students studying in Khalsa College whose management is going to be dominated by the Christians.” The government authorities handed over the management of the College to a nominated body with the

Commissioner as Chairman, and later on June 10, 1908 forced a new constitution on the Governing Body.<sup>102</sup>

In November 1908, one member of the House of Commons raised a question in the British Parliament, whether the Government of India was aware of the fact that the new management of the Khalsa College had created resentment among the Sikhs and whether the Government was doing anything to remove this resentment.<sup>103</sup> Master Sunder Singh of Lyallpur wrote a book, *Ki Khalsa Kalaj Sikhian Da Hai?* in which he clearly stated that the government control over the Khalsa College had hurt the national pride of the Sikhs. He accused the British of having taken over the college in the same dishonest manner as it had annexed the Panjab.<sup>104</sup> D. Petric, Assistant Director, Criminal Intelligence mentions the sentiments of a Sikh student of Khalsa College, who after the Amritsar Educational Conference expressed himself as follows:

“I am not afraid to die. All life is sacrifice. If I had been allowed to live, I might have done great things by sacrifice. Until the nation realises that, lives must be sacrificed, it will never come to anything.”<sup>104.a</sup>

Petrie also stated that a Khalsa College student had been openly advising people in his village not to serve British Government any more.

The year of 1907 saw the beginning of a political agitation in the Punjab in connection with the colonisation Bill of 1907, which was considered to be unduly oppressive to the Punjabi agriculturists. The Bill was passed on the assumption that the land was the property of the Government and the farmer was a mere tenant. This was contrary to the prevailing notions of peasant-proprietorship, continuing from the times of Banda Bahadur. The districts most affected by the new measure were Lyallpur and Rawalpindi, mainly colonised by the Sikhs. Some Smgh Sabha preachers (*Updeshaks*) like Jagat Singh Updeshak and Harbans Singh Attari were accused by the Government of instigating the agriculturists against the authorities.<sup>105</sup> The students of Khalsa College Amritsar also organised a protest demonstration against Sir Charles Rivaz, the Lt. Governor of the Punjab.<sup>106</sup> Agitation concerning the Colonisation Bill was an Important event. The chief strength of the Sikhs was a bold peasantry that possessed proprietary rights in their lands. This was an important Sikh reform different from the Zimindari system in

most other parts of India. Under the Colonisation Bill, the British proposed that the peasant would not have the proprietary rights which they had during the Sikh rule. This was felt to be an important step to reduce the economic, social and political strength of the colonists, most of whom were Sikhs. They reacted against this contemplated erosion of their socio-economic base. This reaction of the Sikh colonists is significant. Because it was based on the Sikh tradition and the fact that it was Banda Bahadur, who had introduced the system of peasant proprietorship and created among the masses a real consciousness of equality and the strength to defend their rights.

The founding of the Sikh Educational Conference by the Chief Khalsa Diwan, in 1908, was also viewed by the Government to be fraught with political motives.<sup>107</sup> It was alleged that "the Conference was founded by the Chief Khalsa Diwan, which resenting Government's interference in Khalsa College affairs in 1908, resolved to build a new Sikh College independent of Government control and devised in the Conference a means of collecting funds for this object."<sup>108</sup> Though declared to be a non-political institution, the Sikh Educational Conference did provide a forum to the Singh Sabha leaders to express their views on the day-to-day affairs- religious, social, educational and even political. Some of the speeches delivered at various conferences by the Chief Khalsa Diwan leaders were thought to be marked with strong political bias. At the third Sikh Educational Conference held at Amritsar in 1910, Professor Jodh Singh of the Khalsa College Amritsar was charged with giving 'seditious talk' in connection with the government system of education.<sup>109</sup> The British Government also began to view the activities of Sunder Singh Majithia, Tarlochan Singh (Pleader), Professor Jodh Singh and Harbans Singh Attari with suspicion.<sup>110</sup> The authorities also noticed that teachers like Nihal Singh, Sunder Singh, Niranjana Singh, Hari Singh Cheema and others were openly provoking the students against the British.<sup>111</sup>

It was said that in the course of their lectures these teachers quite often, referred to the days of Sikh ascendancy, their past glory and their present subjugation.<sup>112</sup> The students were so much excited that in 1910, when R.G. Wright took over as the Principal of the Khalsa College, they expressed their resentment against an Englishman's appointment by pasting handbills on the College walls.<sup>113</sup> On another occasion, when Gopal Krishan Gokhale came

to Amritsar, he was given a hearty welcome by the students of the Khalsa College. Their enthusiasm was reflected in the fact that they even unyoked his horses and themselves pulled his carriage 'to the College where his lecture was listened with thunderous applause.'<sup>114</sup>

The British acted in defiance of the Sikh sentiments and interests. The Minto-Morley Reforms, of 1909, were discriminatory against the Sikhs. The Muslim minority was conceded separate representation and weightage in the States where they were a minority, as well as at the Centre. Similar consideration was not shown to the Sikhs in Punjab. This shows that the British were always niggardly, when it was a question of promoting Sikh political interests. Hardly they were given the same treatment as the Muslim minority. As the events are, they show that The British were carefully reluctant to adopt policies that would build the real strength of the community.

The Khalsa Advocate, Amritsar, which was the chief spokesman of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, was administered warning three times, between 1911 and 1922, for printing 'objectionable' matters'.<sup>115</sup> *Khalsa Samachar*, Amritsar, in one of its issues, delivered the following message to the Sikhs on the occasion of Guru Gobind Singh's birthday: "The founder of the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh, fought against tyranny and oppression and expelled darkness. He sacrificed his life for the cause of justice and righteousness. O' brave Khalsa? Wake up! Follow in the Guru's footsteps. The country is again in the throes of tyranny and needs sacrifices."<sup>116</sup>

It was not an easy task for the Singh Sabha to restore the values and objectives of the Sikh faith, in view of the stem posture adopted by the British at every step. The Arms Act of 1878, had placed a check on the rights of the Sikhs to wear Kirpan (Sword), which is one of the five essential symbols of the Sikh faith. The movement for emancipation of Kirpan was started in 1913, when Baba Nihal Singh was arrested for wearing a Kirpan.<sup>117</sup>

The incident sent a wave of indignation among the Sikhs. The Chief Khalsa Diwan and the Singh Sabha held hundreds of meetings. Consequently, an agitation was launched. After some Sikhs had suffered arrests, the Government exempted these Sikhs from the Arms Act and allowed them the possession and the wearing of the Kirpan on June 25, 1914.<sup>118</sup> In spite of the exemption for wearing *Kirpan*, the Sikh soldiers were still not allowed to wear It in the army. Three soldiers at Roorkee were punished and

dismissed for wearing it. The Singh Sabhas held protest meetings but they were not taken back. Bhai Mangal Singh of the 34th Sikh Regiment, who was afterwards martyred at Nanakana Sahib, was dismissed and sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment (R.I.) for the same fault. It was only after the First World War that the Government sanctioned the wearing of *Kirpans* by Sikh soldiers both in uniform and plain clothes, while serving on the active list.<sup>119</sup> McLeod seems unaware of the *Kirpan* agitation, when he states that the British required the "Sikh recruits to observe the full regalia of the orthodox Khalsa identity."<sup>120</sup> Fox too suffers from a similar mis-conception, when he says that the Sikh identity and their religious values were subsidised by the British.<sup>121</sup> In this context N.G. Barrier's opinion that the British played an important role in maintaining Sikh identity<sup>122</sup> looks so odd especially when it contradicts his own observations in defence of British neutrality towards the three Punjab communities. Want of indepth study has led these scholars completely to overlook the overwhelming evidence relating to the Singh Sabha struggle for their religious rights, whether it be the Anand Marriage Act (1909), or the right to wear Kirpan, or the control over the shrines and other institutions. The lack of clear perception has led them to make confusing and contradictory statements regarding the British motives and policies. The confusion arises mainly because the general policy of the British, after the Mutiny, was not to disturb the religious norms of the soldier. So far as the British policy in the state was concerned, it was obviously directed against the promotion of the Sikh ideological identity.

The Chief Khalsa Diwan preachers consciously mingled politics with religion in the course of their speeches. The tone of their speeches clearly reflected their dissatisfaction with British Government. Political and economic backwardness of the community was attributed to the loss of political power. The preachers quite often referred to the days of political ascendancy of the Khalsa and tended to compare their political subjugation with the bitter experiences of the past under the Mughals. The preachers argued that the Sikhs suffered under the Mughals because of the tyranny of the rulers. As a corollary, the responsibility for the then existing state of affairs was attributed to the British. The Government began to suspect the motives and designs of the Singh Sabha preachers.<sup>123</sup> Many cases were reported to the Government in which Sikh preachers were found instigating

the people against the Government.<sup>124</sup> In spite of their handicaps, in the earlier stages, the Singh Sabha *parcharaks* (preachers), through their emphasis on religion, were able to make successful appeal to the Sikh mind and to awaken the Sikh consciousness to its religio-political entity. The organisation of festivals, prayer-meetings, *Nagar Kirtan* (religious processions) and *Kavi Samelans* (Religio-poetical recitations) was attempted to escape the notice of the intelligence authorities who normally prohibited political activities and gatherings. This role of the Singh Sabha preachers in awakening the Sikh masses from religion to politics is important. A contemporary Government report noted: "The Chief Khalsa Diwan keeps a staff of paid preachers (Updeshaks) who stamp the country and lecture on various topics- social, educational, religious, political, and more often than not, all four are inextricably intermingled."<sup>125</sup>

Sikh militancy assued alarming proportions with the Rikhabganj Gurdawara affair in 1913.<sup>126</sup> The Government unthinkingly acquired some land attached to the Gurdwara and demolished its outer wall so that a road could be built to the nearby Secretariat.<sup>127</sup> "Bitter agitation arose among the Sikh masses."<sup>128</sup> The Sikhs agitated and threatened to launch a *Morcha* but it was abandoned because of the First World War.<sup>129</sup>

It is well known that the translation of the Sikh scripture, which the British had commissioned the Christian missionary, Dr. Trumpp, to undertake was full of derogatory references to the Sikh Gurus and was offensive to the Sikh sentiments. On the other hand, scholars like J.D. Cunningham, Evans Bell, and John Sullivan had to suffer extreme penalties of dismissal from service for writing honest accounts, but what Government considered to be pro-Sikh. M.A. Macauliffe, who produced a monumental work on Sikh religion in six volumes also did not find favour with the British and was not given the benefits and advantages enjoyed by Dr. Trumpp, who wrote against the Sikhs.

*Rebellion in Punjab:-* The failure of the Government to protect the rights of the Sikh immigrants living in Canada and America, who were the victims of racial discrimination, led to the formation of a revolutionary organisation known as the Hindustan Ghadr Party., The object of the Ghadr Party was to spread an armed rebellion and free India from the foreign yoke.<sup>130</sup> War was considered a good opportunity to cause the rebellion, especially because early British reverses involving large scale casualties of

the Sikh soldiers from the rural areas seemed to the Ghadrites a ripe stage for achieving their objective.<sup>131</sup>

Ghadr Party was virtually a Sikh organisation and Sohan Singh Bhakna was its President. These persons came to Punjab and started their subversive activities both in rural central Punjab and among the Sikh soldiery. By the end of 1914, the Ghadrites succeeded in sending one thousand revolutionaries to India out of the total membership of ten thousand. Some of the Singh Sabhas, were said to be sympathetic to the Ghadrites, Bhai Takhat Singh entertained the delegates of the Ghadr Party when they visited Ferozepur. Daljit Singh, assistant editor of the Punjabi Bhain, a monthly publication of the Sikh Kanya Maha Vidyala, Ferozepur, joined the Ghadrites and became a Secretari of Baba Gurdit Singh, leader of the Kama Gata Maru affair.<sup>132</sup> The methods to be employed by the delegates (of the Ghadr Party) in pushing campaign in India appeared to have been discussed in the weekly meetings of the Singh Sabha at Lahore.....A member of the Singh Sabha in advocating these measures spoke of creating a spirit of awakening among Hindus and Sikhs.”<sup>133</sup> However, the Government succeeded in crushing the rebellion before it could assume bigger dimensions. Before the appointed date for large scale rebellion in the army or the state could be started, information leaked out at Lahore. A wide spread hunt for the rebels in the state was made and scores were hanged and sent to transportation for life.

The Ghadrites to their chagrin, discovered that the Congress leaders were more sympathetic to the British rather than to the Ghadrite revolutionaries.<sup>134</sup> Tilak, the so called ‘militant’ Congressite had expressed his strong disapproval of the activities of the Ghadrites. Gokhale is said to have openly told the Viceroy that he would like the British to extend their stay in India.<sup>135</sup> There is no denying the fact that the Ghadr Movement received a set-back on account of lack of support from the Congress leadership and their persecution evoked no sympathy from these quarters. This is an important political event which influenced the Sikhs and their psyche. For Sikh independence Kartar Singh Sarabha is as great a hero as, if not greater than, Bhagat Singh. In his memory the first statue was raised in Ludhiana, though statues of other heroes, including of Bhagat Singh, were raised much later.

In this regard three things are extremely significant. The rebellion was by and large a Sikh affair and took place mostly in



rural Punjab. Nothing of this sort or extent appeared in the rest of the country. Ninety per cent of the participants and the sufferers were Sikhs. The second point is that two of the noted Sikh mystics, Baba Wasakha Singh and Bhai Randhir Singh were the participants, who were sent to Andamans as life convicts.

This indicates that in Sikhism there is a basic and inalienable ideological link between religion and righteous political activity. Third, it is noteworthy that while Sikh masses were politically awakened to sustain a rebellion, persons who later became political leaders of the Congress or Indian independence were whole-heartedly cooperating with the British war effort during this period, and the idea of liberation was beyond their ken, if not foreign to them.

Here it is relevant to quote the confessional statement of Mewa Singh in 1914 who had eliminated William Hopkinson recruited from India for suppressing a ferment among Canadian Sikhs and whose agent Bela Singh had murdered two Sikhs in the Gurdawara. Prior to his execution, he stated; "My religion does not teach me to bear enmity with anybody, no matter what class, creed or order he belongs to, nor had I any enmity with Hopkinson. I heard that he was suppressing my poor people very much.....I being a staunch Sikh-could no longer bear to see the wrong done both to my innocent countrymen and the Dominion of Canada...And I, performing the duty of a true Sikh and remembering the name of God, will proceed towards the scaffold with the same amount of pleasure as the hungry babe does towards its mother. I shall have the rope around my neck thinking it to be a rosary of God's name...."<sup>136</sup>

Now, who had taught Mewa Singh an ordinary Sikh coming from a remote Punjab village and migrating to Canada for earning his living, an essential principle of the Sikh religion, namely, to react against social injustice. It would be naive to say that Mewa Singh or the Ghadrites were the product of British policy. What the Singh Sabha did was to revive and invoke the teachings, training and traditions of the Gurus. For, the history of Sikhism and other whole-life religions clearly demonstrates that it is the blood of the martyrs that alone can create a healthy and sound moral conditioning of the masses and not any artificial administrative attempts in pursuance of colonial interests.

When the War came to an end in 1918, the Sikhs launched a strong agitation under the leadership of Harchand Singh of

Lyallpur and Sardul Singh Caveeshar. They appealed to the Sikhs to volunteer themselves for the *Shaheedee Jatha* (band of martyrs) and to join a march to Delhi to re-erect the demolished wall of the Gurdwara Rakab Ganj. However, the timely intervention of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha saved the situation from getting worse. The Government acceded to the Sikh demand by restoring the Gurdwara wall.<sup>137</sup>

The tragedy of Budge Budge Ghat came as a bolt from the blue for the Sikhs. A group of Sikh immigrants returning from Canada became the victims of the British high-handedness. Eighteen men were killed and another twenty five were injured.<sup>138</sup> However, Gurdit Singh, their leader, along with twenty eight of his companions escaped. The rest were rounded up and sent to Punjab, where over two hundred of them were interned under the Ingress Ordinance. This incident was universally condemned and the Sikh public opinion was greatly mobilised against the British. "Several Sikh papers notably the *Khalsa Akhbar* (of Harchand Singh of Lyallpur) and *Sher-i-Punjab*, both started in 1914, attacked the Government in connection with the Budge Budge Ghat incident:." <sup>139</sup>

Sardul Singh Caveeshar an important contemporary writes, "The Kamagata Maru tragedy at Budge Budge was another cause of estrangement between the Sikhs and the Government. Through the foolishness of some police officers, a tragedy was enacted at Budge Budge that threw the whole of India into consternation.... The subsequent ruthless treatment of the returned emigrants by Sir Michael O' Dwyer did not allow the sore to heal; and the injustice done to India and the Sikhs by the Canadian Government became a permanent cause of grievance against the British." <sup>140</sup>

Thus the post-war policy of the British resulting in such like incidents, created both resentment and anger among the Sikhs in Punjab. Caveeshar observes; "The Sikhs were in this attitude of mind, when they were thrown in the vortex of Martial Law as a consequence of agitation against the Rowlatt Act." <sup>141</sup>

The Sikh mind was seriously disturbed. Agitation against the Rowlatt Act started while the Sikh feelings were pent up. This aggravated the Sikh feelings in the Central Punjab, who were already aggrieved at the treatment of the Canadian Government and the returned immigrants from there at Budge Budge Ghat. This led to violent reaction as reported in the Government communique: "The last communique issued brought the history of

events in Lahore and Amritsar as then known down to the afternoon of the 12th of April (1919). The information in the possession of Government was not complete at the time of its issue. The morning train from Ferozepur on the 12th was held up outside Kasur Station and looted by a mob of about 1,000; of whom many were armed with lathis. Two Europeans, honorary Lieutenant Selby of the Ordnance and Sergeant Mostyn, R.A., were killed and another was injured. After looting the train and doing a great deal of damage in the Station, the crowd burnt the post office and attacked the Tehsil. Here, however, they were driven off by the police with a loss of one killed and about six wounded. Some arrests were made. Several stations on the Kasur and Amritsar line were attacked the same day. Khem Karan station was looted and treasury at Tarn Taran was assaulted unsuccessfully. As the result of these disturbances it was decided to march a movable column with a gun from Kasur through the Mdjha to Amritsar. The column started on the morning of Sunday, the 13th, and arrived at Khem Karan.

On Sunday, the 13th, the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act, 1911, was applied to the districts of Lahore and Amritsar which were declared to be proclaimed areas under the Act. The result of this action is to make it illegal to hold, without permission, a public meeting for the furtherance or discussion of any subject likely to cause disturbance or public excitement without permission.”<sup>142</sup>

The events mentioned above clearly explain why unlike in the rest of the country, the agitation against the Rowlatt Act took a serious rebellious trend in the central districts of Punjab where the Sikh population was predominant. This also explains why despite the prohibitory order in the districts of Lahore and Amritsar, thousands of Sikhs came to Amritsar on the Baisakhi and later thronged at the Jallianwala Bagh in defiance of the local order banning the holding of any meeting in the city. That this defiant agitation was predominantly a rural Sikh reaction is evident from the fact that out of the total casualties of 1300 more than sixty per cent were Sikhs, when it is well known that Sikh population in the City was just marginal.<sup>143</sup>

An important fact which has often been ignored is that in Punjab most agitations have been mass upsurges and movements unlike those in the rest of India, where those have generally been either among the literate classes or in the urban areas. In Punjab

since the Ghadr rebellion, the trial and sentences of death and transportation of life to Ghadrites, following it, and the events preceding and following the Budge Budge Ghat tragedy, were a chain of occurrences that never allowed the enlivened and agitated Sikh spirit to rest in peace. From the time of the Ghadar rebellion upto the Jallianwala Bagh Firing, the Sikh Punjab had remained in continuous ferment. As against it, the position in the rest of India had been very different, and one fact alone indicates the climate, namely, that Mahatma Gandhi had earned during that period two Medals, Kaiser-i-Hind and Zulu War Medal.<sup>144</sup> As stated already, the Congress leaders like Gokhale, Tilak and Lajpat Rai were sympathetic to the British and condemned the Ghadrite revolutionaries, whose activities, they openly disapproved.<sup>145</sup>

The Ghadr unrest in central rural Punjab leading to the times of Sikh gathering at Jallianwala Bagh and the oppression indulged by the British administration in the rural Punjab are primarily and fundamentally a continuous episode in the Sikh struggle for independence. In fact, it is only incidentally a part of the Indian political movement which till then was living in a cooperative mood and enjoying the benefits of the Raj. Much less had it gained any momentum or level to make such a confrontation and suffer large-scale oppression. Another fact which indicates the Sikh character of the agitation is that it was G.A. Wathen, the Principal of the premier Sikh educational institution in Punjab, who felt so deeply concerned at the inhuman activities of General Dyer that he ran on a motor-cycle from Amritsar to Lahore and woke up Governor O'Dwyer to request him not to approve Dyer's action.<sup>144</sup> It is very relevant and important to understand the complexion of events in Punjab. The fact is that the pre-Jallianwala Bagh rebellion was a Sikh affair in the Punjab and for that matter the reaction and the repression perpetrated by Dyer and O'Dwyer were directed against the Sikhs. K.F. Rustamji writes: "The people of Punjab are a vibrant, vigorous lot. . .like all brave, warlike races they are ready for a fight whenever they feel they have been ill-treated or misled. The Punjabis who participated in satyagraha and violence against the British were so strong in the vanguard that the majority of the British in India felt at that time that making an example of them at Jallianwala Bagh was necessary. The wisest believed that in the process general Dyer was reckless and overdid it. Few saw it as a setback to British rule. The British never recovered from the effects of that mistake till the end".<sup>144-a</sup> That explains how the rural mind

of Udham Singh remained deeply agitated and aggrieved to prompt him to act against O'Dwyer, the person responsible for the Punjab tragedies of the period. Here it is also significant to state that the basic inspiration that sustained or inspired Udham Singh to attack O'Dwyer was religious. This is also evidenced by his letters and his demand for 'Gutka', the Sikh prayer Book of Gurbani.<sup>147</sup> It is also relevant in this connection, that whereas the non-Sikh Indian communities in U.K. disowned him, he was supported only by the Sikhs of a Gurdwara of West London.<sup>148</sup>

The above narration of facts shows that following the Singh Sabha movement side by side with the religious awakening, the British measures against political awakening became increasingly open and firm. It is also clear that the British had always been vigilant in this regard and never failed to suppress, to the extent possible, the growth of Sikh political consciousness. The important fact is that under the Sikh ideology religious consciousness, socio-political consciousness and consequent responsibility and reaction go hand in hand. The net result was that in 1919 the Sikh religious and socio-political consciousness had reached, because of its tradition and history, a distinctly higher level of commitment and activity than among the people in other parts of the country. This is clearly borne from a contemporary Government Report: "the Home Rule Agitation and Rowlatt Bills exercised an undesirable effect on the whole press. The Sikh press ventilated petty grievances that the Government was unmindful of the true interests of the Sikhs."<sup>149</sup> Thus, it is this what explains the role of the Sikhs in the Ghadr revolution and that of Mewa Singh in Canada. Significant as it is, at that time the Indian political leaders had mostly been cooperating with the British war efforts. This clearly explains, as we have seen, that when Gandhi after giving up his role of cooperation during the War, gave the call against the Rowlett Bills, the response and reaction in Punjab were urgent and significant compared to such reaction in parts of the country where the call had been given. For the Sikhs, it was only a continuation of the socio-political struggle which the Singh Sabha had initiated.

The brutal massacre of Jallianwala Bagh in 1919, in which hundreds of Sikhs were killed and wounded, added fuel to the fire. After the Singh Sabha Movement had helped the Sikhs to regain their strength and cohesion, the Sikhs felt that it was time they cleared their Gurdwaras from the non-Sikh Mahants and the adverse influences which had the clear backing of the British. So

far as the political consciousness is concerned, it has always been a part of the Sikh ethos, as has been evidenced by the Kuka and the Ghadr Movements. With the Singh Sabha, as we shall see, it was only a question of tactical move when they for some decades remained quiet on the political front. In order to remove the confusion and despondency, naturally prevalent after annexation, they wanted first to rebuild their socio-religious cohesion. Tempers rose very high when the Manager and priests of the Darbar Sahib condemned the Kamagata Maru and Ghadr Sikh at the Akal Takhat. Later on, they presented a robe of honour to Brigadier-General Dyer, who was responsible for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.<sup>150</sup> It was such suicidal policies of the British that Principal Wathen had rushed to stop. As a saying goes, it is human blunders that sometimes change history. During these days, there spread an unfounded rumour among the Sikh masses, as well as the Sikhs in the British Indian army, that since the Sikhs were involved in the Anti-Rowlatt Act agitation and had used the Golden Temple complex as their hide out, the British authorities had resorted to aerial bombardment of the Golden Temple.<sup>151</sup> This infuriated Sikhs all over Punjab. To quell this unrest the army took over the administration, and whatever vestiges of a civilised government had remained also vanished. The British Government's actions at Amritsar set the tone of "Dyerachy" for the rest of the province in which the Sikhs were the worst sufferers of the ruthless repression and suppression carried on by the Government. Many Sikh villages were subjected to bombing and machine-gunning from the air; one of the targets successfully hit was the Khalsa High School at Gujranwala, where many people were killed and wounded.<sup>152</sup> In the seven weeks that the Punjab was administered by martial law nearly 1200 were killed and at least 3600 were wounded.<sup>153</sup> All this brutal repression came as a shock to the Sikh masses. Winston Churchill made the most scathing criticism of General Dyer's action. He described it as "an episode which appeared to be without parallel in the modern history of the British Empire...an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stood in singular and sinister isolation".<sup>154</sup>

In this context and the known misuse of the Gurdwaras, the Sikhs became acutely conscious that they could no longer afford to permit their own sacred shrines to become places of corruption, and to be used to destroy the very roots and the sap that in history

had given them unbelievable strength and vigour. Thereafter started the Gurdwara reform movement and the peacefully organised confrontation with the British. For, the cover had been lifted and it had become clear that behind the priests and the Mahants stood the strength and might of the British. Consequently and logically as a second important step, the Sikhs did the greatest mobilisation against the Government for regaining the control of their Gurdwaras from the corrupt hands.

The Chief Khalsa Diwan had, no doubt, formed a sub-committee to suggest ways and means to reform the Gurdwaras but it could not take effective measures owing to the stiff opposition of the Mahants and Pujaris who enjoyed the support and protection of the Government. In 1919, the Central Sikh League was established at Amritsar with a view to protecting the political interests of the Sikhs.<sup>155</sup> The League passed a resolution of non-cooperation with the British Government in October, 1919, its meeting was attended by Harbans Singh Attari, Baba Kharak Singh and Master Tara Singh. In 1920 the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee was established and undertook to 'take over' all the Shrines including the Darbar Sahib.<sup>156</sup> The establishment of this committee brought the issues to a wider notice. Thus "a movement which was religious in origin rapidly acquired a political character."<sup>157</sup> The Sikhs now began to realize that a clash with the Government was inevitable in order to secure justice and safeguard their interests.

Thus the Singh Sabha movement, after the period of reconstruction, naturally, gave birth to the Akali movement which was equally motivated by religious as well as political considerations. The following remarks of V.M. Smith, a contemporary observer, are illuminating in this respect: "All Sikh traditions, whether national or religious, are martial, in times of political excitement the militant spirit reasserts itself."<sup>158</sup> It was, therefore, natural that at that stage of history, the Sikhs should come into direct clash with the British policies which, as we have expalined earlier, were hostile to their political and ideological interests.

*Conclusion:* The above narration of events shows that two aspects of the British policy towards the Sikhs have been clear and consistent, namely - their comparative political suppression as evidenced in the Minto-Morley (1909) and Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (1919) and the Sikh ideological erosion by a studied

patronage of Hinduised *Mahants* and *Pujaris* and control of their shrines through Government nominated Managers.

The Ghadr Rebellion under the Presidentship of Sohan Singh Bhakna and the leadership of religiously oriented Ghadrite Babas and the martyrdoms of Kartar Singh Sarabha and his associates had politically inflamed the Sikhs in Punjab. Extremely painful was the fact that the Government had managed to have disowned and declared persons of the religious eminence of Baba Wasakha Singh and Bhai Randhir Singh of the Ghadr Movement as non-Sikhs by a Sarbrah (custodian appointed by the Government) of the Golden Temple. Because of the Ghadr Rebellion, suppression of the Sikhs continued to be severe during the War. These events, however, made it evident that a political struggle with the British with the dual objective of political freedom and removal of Government control over Sikh Gurdwaras would become inevitable. It was clear that more than any other area in the country, the Sikhs in Punjab were ready for a confrontation with the British.

We have already recorded that Sikh religious ethos is both the foundation and the strength of their urges and aspirations for socio-political liberty. The Sikh shrines, particularly the Oarbar Sahib, Amritsar, continues since the times of the Gurus to be the fount of Sikh power and inspiration.

Under the leadership of the Akalis, the Sikhs came into an open clash with the Government, first for the liberation of their shrines and then for the liberation of their motherland. The struggle for the liberation of their shrines has' been given the appellation Third Sikh War. The two Anglo-Sikh Wars had already been fought in the middle of the last century. In the Third Sikh War the stakes were the freedom of their Gurdwaras and their religion. It was fought on the basis and strength of their religious identity and institutions. For the Sikh the freedom of his religion and the freedom of his motherland are synonymous. This is not a recent or a post-facto interpretation of Sikh religion. We record below the actual understanding of a contemporary who partook in the Sikh struggle. Sardul Singh Caveeshar writes, "A Sikh wants to fight his country's battles from the vantage ground of his religion. Being of a religious trend of mind, he finds everything subordinate to his *Dharma*; politics is nothing for him but a promising child of religion. A Sikh has not yet developed that fine sense of doubtful value that divides life into water - tight compartments and makes of religion in the West something different from one's social and



political life. For the Sikh politics and religion are one. He wants the freedom of his religion, he wants the freedom of his country, but he knows that he cannot have one without the other. If religion is safe, he is sure to get back, soon or late, the freedom of the country. In fact he regards religion as the strong post, from which one should start to get back the lost liberty, as, in his opinion, the religious spirit, alone can keep the freedom of a country safe when once that has been won.”<sup>159</sup>

Still among scholars who talk of the British promotion of the Khalsa identity, there is a clear lack of understanding of the Sikh ideology, the realities of the situation, Sikh history and the general historical perspective. As already explained the Sikh ideology laid down by Guru Nanak and the Guru Granth involves a combination of the spiritual and the empirical elements of life. The history of Islam and Judaism that make similar ideological combination furnishes very helpful analogies. It is, therefore, sheer misinterpretation, misrepresentation or misunderstanding of the Sikh ideology to talk of two Sikh identities, namely, the Khalsa and the Nanakpanthis. Scholars drawn from pacifist or dichotomous religions, involving divorce between religious and empirical lives and recommending Sanyas, on...the one hand, and *Varna Ashram Dharma*, on the other hand, not only misunderstand the unity of the Sikh doctrine but tend sometimes to measure the Sikh ideology and history by the standards of their own religions. Often such basically conditioned vision is inclined not to take an objective or over-all view. We have made it very clear how Guru Gobind Singh's creation of the Khalsa was the epitome of Guru Nanak's mission and how Khalsa and Nanakpanthis were synonymous terms and were taken and treated as such by the Muslim rulers, their contemporaries or persecutors.

It is also important that the first coin struck by Banda Singh Bahadur in 1765 clearly recognises his victory to be due to the grace of the sword of Guru Nanak. Similarly the coin of Ranjit Singh does not mention any particular person or king except Guru Nanak as the true emperor of both the worlds, spiritual and empirical. Contemporary Mufti-Ali-ud-Din, author of 'Ibrat Nama', makes a significant statement, about Sikh identity of the first half of the nineteenth century, "the Sikhs as belonging to a class highly conscious of the need of shaking off meaningless rituals that the Brahmins had fostered on the Hindu society They observed no formalities in the matter of dress and social intercourse also.

*Ram-Ram* and *Salam* had given place to *Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh*. They had also done away with the Brahmanic practice of reading the Vedas, the Shastras and the Puranas and recited only Guru's Bani. The morning prayer consisted of the recitation of the Japji and the Sukhmani. They were particularly careful of their personal cleanliness and purity. A regular daily bath before offering prayers was considered essential but there were sometimes deviations and those who preferred to wash their mouth, hands and feet alone were permitted to do so and the practice was known as *panjishruma*. *Ardas* was an indispensable and prominent feature of their prayers. It was through *Ardas* that the Sikhs solicited help from the Almighty for the efficient performance of their daily life and duties."<sup>160</sup>

The Sikh identity was founded by Guru Nanak, it was nurtured by the subsequent Gurus. When mature, the final seal in the form of the *Amrit* ceremony was put on it by the Tenth Master. The Sikh Gurus themselves have been emphasising the unity of the Sikh doctrine. This is evidenced by the use of word 'Nanak' in every hymn of the Gurus in the Guru Granth. Thus, ideologically, scripturally, traditionally and in the eyes of the community and its opponents, there was only one identity, namely, the followers of the Gurus. The history of the struggle and persecution in the 18th century and the way the companions of Banda got beheaded at Delhi make for singularity of identity and not for its plurality. Identities are built by the ideology, motivation, the blood of the martyrs, tradition, suffering and sacrifice and not by the juxtaposition of material facts or by verbal argumentation. Therefore, the two components that constitute Sikh identity, namely, Sikh ideology and the Sikh history during the time of Gurus and the periods of their structuring, have to be taken into view and not just ignored. That is why the Singh Sabha leadership used Gurbani and the Sikh history, especially the armed resistance to the Mughals, as a rallying symbol for the Sikh struggle.

The second factor is the reality of the situation in the post-annexation (1849) period. The Khalsa army, its strength and power had been annihilated. The British in power were extremely conscious of the Sikh capacity for resurgence and they sought to ensure in every manner, as indicated earlier, to see that there was no political uprising in the State. After the 1857 experience they were doubly conscious and particularly vigilant to take all measures against any sign of political unrest or uprising. This is

clear from the known tyrannical manner in which the minor Namdhari uprising was dealt with. As we have noted the British allowed, under the protection of their wings, free play to the Christian missionaries to attack the identity and ideology of the Sikh religion, its history and institutions. These missions were located in the heart of Sikh areas like Batala. The purpose and work of these missions are well known. The journalistic work of McLeod, who has for long years been a functionary of the Batala Christian Centre can be taken to be typically representative and revealing of the aims and objectives of such Centres. Further, in order to destroy the very roots of Sikhism, the British gave charge of Sikh Shrines to Hinduised Managers, Mahants or Pujaris, who did their best to suppress Sikh practices and tradition and instead to introduce Hindu ways and customs. For example, whereas Jassa Singh, the head of Sikh leadership, when he struck the coin after his victory of Lahore in 1761, felt no stigma in calling himself a Kalal, a low Shudra in the Hindu caste hierarchy, the Mahants and Pujaris introduced the practice that Mazhabi Sikhs would not be given Parshad at Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, even though Mazhabi Sikhs formed a part of Ranjit Singh's army. In short, had Jassa Singh been alive in the British period, he would have been debarred from being regarded as a Sikh to be given Parshad at Darbar Sahib, Amritsar.

This was the state of affairs after the annexation which the leaders of the Singh Sabha had to battle against. Therefore, they decided, and very wisely, that it would be suicidal to fight on two fronts, namely, the political front and the socio-religious front. Here it is necessary to mention that the first step the Sikhs took, after they had revived the religious understanding, cohesion and consciousness of the community and dispelled its sense and shock of the loss of empire, was to free the Gurdwaras from the *Mahants* and *Pujaris*. And it is well known that the agitation which was only directed against these private priests (*Mahants* and *Pujaris*) involved the Sikhs in confrontation with the Government which was, really, the power behind them and was interested in their continuance as the instruments of erosion of the religious base, the real strength, of the community. Thus, the realities of the situation were such that if the Sikhs had tried to fight on both the fronts failure would have been inevitable. It speaks volumes for their wisdom that they first strengthened their ideological understanding and foundation. And in this they succeeded to a

large, extent.

Thirdly, these scholars also ignore the general historical perspective. For example, we refer here to the period of Jewish history for centuries after AD. 70, when consequent to the fall of Jerusalem and the total annihilation of the political elite and the Temple by the Romans, started the intensive work of religious reconstruction. These religious leaders represented the community both in the religious and the political spheres, this period of scholars and Rabbis, historian, Cecil Roth, calls the work and time of 'The Rule of the Wisest.' Ideologically, Judaism too combines the spiritual life with the empirical life of man. After AD. 70 it was socio-politically a very lean period of Jewish history. It was a time when "Jerusalem, and the Temple, lay in ruins, and their rebuilding was forbidden... It is true that the people as a whole sat in mourning for those who had fallen in the War, and for the glory that was gone from Israel... The spokesman of the Jewish people had hitherto been the rulers of the house of Herod; but the last male representative of that family Herod Agrippa II, was estranged from his people and had not much longer to live. The High Priest had been hardly less prominent but with the destruction of the Temple, the High Priesthood itself had come to an end. But, even, before the fall of Jerusalem, there had been a category which enjoyed almost equal, if not superior consideration. The Rabbis- the scholars who expounded the Holy Writ- had always been looked up to by the people with reverence. Now, there was no one else to revere. It happened that, before Jerusalem fell, one of the outstanding scholars of his generation, Johanan ben Zakkai, had managed to escape from the city-according to legend, in a coffin borne by his disciples. Titus had permitted him to settle in the township of Jabneh (Jamnia), on the coast near Jaffa, used as a concentration camp, where he opened a school for the study and exposition of the traditional lore. The most eminent of contemporary scholars gathered around him there. The Sanhedrin, formerly the highest Council of State, became reconstituted from members chosen for their erudition rather than for political influence or wealth. During the subsequent long period it is this syndrome constituted of scholarly persons that steered the Jewish people to safety over a period of three and a half centuries. With this scholarly group, its president or Nasi slowly acquired semi-official status and in due course came to be recognised as the representative of the Jewish people in its relations with the Roman

authorities. With the fall of Temple, the Sadducees, who were the religious heads and whose existence was bound up with the essential Temple worship lost their separate identity or influence. The Pharisee scholars were left masters of the field. These persons developed the educational system and became the centres of local life everywhere. These scholars even went on missions to Rome discharging duties pertaining to political matters as well. In A.D. 115 the work of reconstruction was interrupted by a terrible catastrophe. The reason was a political revolt which was put down with an excess of cruelty and bloodshed. Another insurrection took place in A.D. 82. This too was mercilessly suppressed followed by intense religious persecution. A harrow was drawn over the site of Jerusalem, and a new city erected, under the name Aelia Capitolina, into which no Jew was allowed to set foot save once a year, when they were suffered to 'buy their tears' at the Temple site." <sup>161</sup>

The lessons of this period of Jewish history are too obvious to be ignored, by any perceptive historian. When a community suffers political defeat, respite for reconstruction is essential; and during this period the fruitful work has to be a stress on ideology, tradition and the rebuilding of morale and the personality of the community. It involves fight only on one front, namely the religious, the socio-cultural and the educational. Emotional or sporadic political revolts during such a lean period are suicidal and become catastrophic and may put the clock of regeneration back. That is why Roth calls this period of reconstruction by the scholars, Rubbis and others the "Rule of the Wisest". No historian dubs these Jewish religious scholars as stooges or loyalists of the Romans or creation of Roman rulers; nor does any historian ignore centuries of earlier Jewish history and calls the Jewish cohesion and identity revived by these scholars to be the work or creation at the instance of the Roman masters.

Like the efforts of the Jewish Rabbis and scholars, the work of Singh Sabha scholars is so strikingly reconscriptive of the life of the Sikh community that it would be sheer prejudice and distortion to call them the tools or creation of the British Masters. Any course of revival, political or military, other than the one taken by Singh Sabhaites would have been suicidal. Politically and militarily the British were too strong to be taken on directly. Just as the catastrophic result of the two Jewish rebellions crushed by the Romans after the fall of the Temple and Jerusalem, we are well

aware of the dismal fate of the sporadic Kuka uprising and the unorganised plans of the Sandhawalia group that were speedily destroyed with a heavy hand. The British power in India then was too well entrenched and alert to be shaken by such feeble bites. Considering the work and achievements of the Singh Sabha and the Akali Movements from 1873 onwards, it is evident that the Singh Sabhaites and the later Sikh leaders had been politically more wise, alert and conscious than the urban leaders of the Congress like Gokhale and Tilak. In fact, the Congress leaders, it is well known, later only made use of the Sikh struggle, which in its consistency and mass base had taken a clear lead over the subsequent Congress movement. This is also evident from the fact that the Ghadrites and other heroes of the struggle whom these leaders had condemned were later accepted as the martyrs of the Indian freedom movement. And yet no one dubs the Congress leaders as the creation of the British.

Our statement about the Sikh ideology and the entire narration of events from the annexation of Punjab to the start of the Third Sikh War, the Gurdwara Reform Movement, makes a number of issues extremely explicit. The Sikh World view is different from the systems of dichotomous, pacifist, or salvation religions. The Gurus embodied their thesis in the Guru Granth and structured the Sikh Panth and its institutions during a period of over two hundred years. The creation of the Khalsa by the Tenth Master and its struggle during the eighteenth century is a part of its glorious tradition and its history. We have recounted that after annexation two historical forces were working with fixed directions and objectives. The British, as explained, were clear about their political interests and in a studied manner used all means to serve them. For obvious reasons, one of their aims was to erode the religious base of the Sikhs, which gave them their power and vigour. They were fully aware of the potential of their erstwhile adversaries, and while they were keen to divert their energies to other ends, they were equally careful to ensure that the Sikhs were neither unnecessarily provoked nor allowed to regenerate or develop their socio-political strength.

Our analysis shows that the objectives which the British government, on the one hand, and the Singh Sabhaites, on the other hand, continued to pursue were clearly divergent. This made an ultimate clash between them inevitable. It also explains why the Sikh mass struggle for liberation started much earlier than such an

urge in the rest of the country. But the scholars who assume a community of interests and objectives between the British and the Sikhs simply fail to suggest, much less explain, why the clash and the Third Sikh War took place and why it happened in Punjab much earlier than elsewhere.

On the other hand, the Singh Sabhaites knew full well that their only source of inspiration, regeneration and strength was to draw upon their religion, tradition and history. As it is, the course they were to traverse, the lines on which they were to work and the institutions which were to be revived, stood clearly defined and chalked out for them in the Guru Granth and their history. The wisdom of the Singh Sabha leaders lies in their clear understanding of their past and the situation they were to face. While they never wavered from the ideals and objectives that had been laid down for them, they, according to the needs of the times, limited their efforts to the task of regeneration and revival of the spirit of the community, without directing initially its struggle to the political front. We have also seen that having reconstructed and secured their socio-religious base, slowly the Singh Sabhaites started pursuing their political objectives. It is not an accident or just a coincidence that the first tangible rebellion against the British which was mass based took place in Punjab.

It is significant that it happened in the later part of the Singh Sabha period and at a time when in the rest of India there were hardly any signs of any such uprising or even a preparation for it. In fact, the Indian leaders and the politically conscious elite were openly cooperating with the British war effort in those times. Equally contrasted was the reaction of the Sikhs in the Punjab to the Rowlatt Act and similar reaction in the rest of India. The agitation against the Rowlatt Act, culminating in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the subsequent imposition of Martial law and the Akali struggle for the liberation of their shrines were the two offshoots of the religious base that had been securely revived by the Singh Sabha. It is a part of history that between 1919 and 1925 no mass based political struggle was conducted outside Punjab.

It is just idle to suggest that any religious identity, or the Sikh religious identity that had been created by an ideology, new Institutions, and a four-hundred year tradition of martyrdoms and unparalleled sacrifices, could be demolished by the British rulers, as they wished to do, through the Mahants; or that such a vigorous identity could be created by the British, as some writers suggest.

Religious ideologies or identities cannot be created either by wishful thinking or by fiat of the rulers. The fate of Din-i-Illahi of Akbar, an Indian Emperor, seeking to change the established tradition and religions is well-known.

Three features of the British Sikh relations are significant. In the annexation of India, leaderless Sikh armies had given to the British the hardest resistance. Second, the Sikhs were a people capable of rebounding as they did after Abdali's blow at Kup, Third, that the entire Sikh strength lay in their religious base. It is in this context that we have to interpret the two worst massacres of peaceful agitators during the British period. The first was the killing of hundreds of Sikhs gathered on the Baisakhi day at Jallianwala Bagh by general Dyer, who felt that he had nipped in the bud another mutiny. The second was the cold blooded murder and burning of the entire Jatha of 130 peaceful Sikhs who had gone to Nanakana Sahib to hold a gathering there to free the shrine. And it is the British machine guns who under the direction and guidance of the Punjab Administration threatened to shoot thousands of Sikhs who collected to lift and cremate the bodies of the dead Sikhs at the Gurudwara. It is no accident or coincidence that in both these tragedies the victims were predominantly or wholly Sikhs against whom the assaults were directed. Both these tragedies followed the Singh Sabha Movement; the first as a part of the continuing political activity as evidenced by the Kuka Movement, Ghadr rebellion and the pre-Jallianwallah risings in rural Punjab. The second was an overt British intervention when the Sikhs tried to free their Shrines from the Hinduised Mahants. These two greatest political massacres in Indian colonial history were logical results of the British policy towards the Sikhs. However, it is correct that knowing full well the potential of a difficult adversary, the British were careful enough to placate them on minor issues without unnecessarily provoking them into a bitter opposition. It is indeed strange that a perceptive scholar like Richard Fox, who calls the Akali struggle, the Third Anglo-Sikh War, is misled into saying that the Sikhs were transmuted into Singhs by the British. Such a misreading happens, when scholars study a narrow period of events, without viewing them in their long and true perspective, including the guru period, when the Sikh society was created, matured and its targets fixed.

The conclusion of our analysis is that the role of Singh Sabha and the related history of Punjab in the post-annexation period can



be understood only in its religious, ideological and historical perspective. Artificially constructed rationale simply fails to explain the very significant and stormy concentration of events that took place in the State in the half century following 1873 A.D. The glorious role of the Sikhs in the eighteenth century is undoubted. Similar is the outstanding contribution of the community to the Indian struggle for Independence. Unless the appreciation furnished in this paper is accepted, we create a hiatus in Sikh history which no superficial explanation can account for.

#### PREFERENCES

- 1 Stronger- Uncalled for assumption which we shall discuss in detail at a later stage
- 2 McLeod, W.H.; *The Sikh: History, Religion and Society* (New York, 1989), 37.
- 3 Fox, C. Richard; *Lions of the Punjab :Culture in the Making* (New Delhi, 1987), p.143.
- 4 Kapur, A Rajiv; *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith* (London, 1986), p.25.
- 5 Barrier, N. Cerlad; *The Sikhs and Their Literature* Delhi, 1970), Introduction, P.xl.
- 6 Fox; op. cit., pp. 140-145.
- 7 "One, Self-existant, Himself the Creator,  
O Nanak! One continueth, another never was and never will be."  
*Guru Granth*; 'Cauri Rag', Trans.  
Cunningham, J.D.; *A History of the Sikhs* (Delhi, 1966), p.330.
- 8 "Religion consisteth not in mere words;  
He who looketh on all men as equal is religious." Trans. Macauliffe, M.A.; *The Sikh Religion*,  
Vol. I (Delhi,1963), P.60
- 9 "The sense of high and low, and of caste and colour; such are the illusions created in man."  
*Guru Granth*, Trans. Copal Singh; *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol IV (New Delhi, 1987), P.1188.
- 10 "The ignorant fools take stones and worship them. O Hindus, how shall the stone which  
itself sinketh carry you across."  
Trans. Maeaulifee, Vol.I, p.326.
- 11 "O Brahman, thou worshipping and propitiatest the Salagram, and deemest it a good act to  
wear a necklace of sweet basil. Why irrigate barren land and waste thy life."
- 12 "Householders and Hermits are equal, whoever calls on the name of the Lord."  
*Guru Granth*, 'Asa Ragni'. Trans., Cunningham, p. 334. Cunningham, p. 335.
- 14 Dhillon, G.S.; *Researches in Sikh Religion and History* (Chandigarh, 1989), pp. 2-4.
- 15 *Guru Granth*, 'Bhairo', Trans., Teja Singh, *Essays in Sikhism* (Lahore, 1944),

- 16 *Haqiqat-i-Bonau-i-Firqa-i-Sikhan* (1783 AD.) quoted Sher Singh's article, 'Guru Tegh Bahadur Gave His Head For "Millat-i-nau', in *The Sikh Review* Vol.39:2 No.446, February, 1991.
- 17 Ganda Singh (ed.), Sanapat; *Shri Gur Sobha* (Patiala, 1967), pp.32-33.
- 18 Cunningham, J.D.; op.cit., p.64; Bannerjee, I.B.; *Evolution of the Khalsa*, Vol I (Calcutta, 1963), p.116.
- 19 Kapur Singh, *Parasaraprasna* (Amritsar, 1989), (ed.) Piara Singh and Madanjit kaur, p.233.
- 20 Khushwant Singh; *A History of The Sikhs*, Vol.I (New Delhi, 1977), p.107.
- 21 Ganda Singh (ed.); *Early European Accounts of The Sikhs* (New Delhi, 1974), p. 188.
- 22 Bhangu, Rattan Singh; *Prachin Panth Parkash* (ed.) Bhai Vir Singh (Amritsar, 1962), p. 235; Forster, George; *A Journey From Bengal England*. Vol. I (Patiala, 1970) pp.312-313; Gupta, H.R.; *History of The Sikhs*, Vol.II (Delhi.,1978), p.39.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Devi Prasad, Pandit; *Gulshan-i-Punjab* (Lucknow, 1872), p. 224; Cunningham; *op.cif.* p. 301.
- 25 Dhillon, G.S.; *op.cit.*, p. 77.
- 26 Khuswant Singh; *op. cit.*, Vol.II, p. 137.
- 27 Khullar, K.K. ; *Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (New Delhi, 1980), p.185.
- 28 Government Records, VIII-II, p. 328; *Punjab Administrative Report*, 1851-53, pp. 41-42.
- 29 *Lahore Political Diaries*, Vol.III, p.260; *Secret Consultation*, 7 October, 1848, No. 621; Fauja Singh; 'Presidential Address' in *Punjab History Conference, Proceedings* (Punjabi University, Patiala, November, 1965), p. 139
- 30 Khushwant Singh; *op. cit.*, Vol.II, pp. 70-71.
- 31 Foreign Secret Consultation, No.21, April 28, 1849.
- 32 *Ibid*
- 33 Yadav, Kripal Chandra; 'British Policy Towards Sikhs, 1849-57' in Harbans Singh and Barrier, N. Gerald (ed.); *Essays in Honour of Dr. Ganda Singh* (Patiala, 1976), p.189.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 Khuswant Singh; *op. cit.*, Vol.II, p. 88.
- 36 Hunter, W.W.; *The Marquess of Dalhousie* (Oxford,1985), p.99.
- 37 Yadav, Kirpal Chandra; *op. cit.*, p. 190.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p.191.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 Petrie, D. (Assistant *Director*, Criminal Intelligence, Government of India); 'Development in Sikh Politics (1900-1911) (A Report)' in Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee; *Gurdwara Gazettee* (Amritsar, April 1969), p. 11.
- 41 Khushwant Singh; *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p. 195.
- 42 Teja Singh; *op. cit.*, p.161.

- 43 Khushwant Singh; *op. cit.*, Vol.II, p. 94n.
- 44 Maunier, Rene; *The Sociology of Colonies* Vol.I (London, 1949), p. 171.
- 45 Dr. W.H. McLeod, a protagonist of some obviously odd and incongruous and superficial formulations about Sikh history has lived and worked at this centre.
- 46 Clark, Reobert; *A Brief Account of Thirty Years of Missonary Work in the Punjab and Sindh* (Lahore, 1883), pp. 18-19,66.
- 47 The most notable of these Missionaries societies were the American Presbyterian Mission, the Church of England, the Cambridge Mission, the Baptist Mission and the Church of Scotland.
- 48 Government of India; *Census of India*, 1921, Vol. I, p. 117.
- 49 Clark, Reobert; *op.cit.*, pp. 44-45; *Letters of Queen Victoria 1837-1861*, VoI. III (London, 1908), pp. 68-69.
- 50 Archer, John Oark; *The Sikhs* (Princeton, 1946), p.266.
- 51 *Selections From the Records of the Government of India*, Foreign Department, No. VI, *General Report On the Administration of the Punjab Territories, 1852-53*, p. 498, in, Yadav, Kirpal Chandra; *op.cit.*, p. 196.
- 52 In the Central Punjab, there was a dispossessed aristocracy which had "been brow beaten and rendered insert by a calculated official policy of intimidation and suppression with the beginning of the British Rule in the Punjab.'  
I Fauja Singh (ed.); *History of Punjab*, Vol. VIII, See article by the editor on 'Kuka Movement'.
53. Khazan Singh, Jangnama Dilli' in Ashok, Shamsher Singh (ed.) *Prachin Varan To Janganame* (Amritsar, 1971), pp. 324-48
- 54 Punjab Government Records; *Mutiny Reports*, Vol.VIII, Part I, p.237.
- 55 Khushwant Singh, *op cit.*, Vol. II, p. 109.
- 56 Fauja Singh; 'Presidential Address', *Punjab History Conference*, First Session November 12-14,1965, (Punjab University, Patiala), pp. 138-139.
- 57 Rehman, M.A; *Lord Dalhousie's Administration of conquered and Annexed States* (Delhi, 1963), pp. 47-48,67.
- 58 Bell, Evans; *The Annexation of the Punjab and Raja Daleep Singh* (London, 1882), pp.82-83.
- 59 Fauja Singh; 'Presidential Address', *op.cit.* p.139.
- 60 Payne, C.H.; *A Short History of The Sikhs* (London n.d.), p. 216.
- 61 Ellinwood, C.De Witt (Jr.); 'An Historical Study of the Punjabi Soldier in World War I', in Harbans Singh and Barrier; *op. cit.*, p. 348.
- 62 Barrier, N. Gerald; 'The Punjab Government and Communal Politics, 1870-1908 in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXVII, November 3, May 1968, p.525.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 526.
- 64 Barrier, N. Gerald; 'Sikh Emigrants and Their Homeland' in Dusenbery, Verne A. and Barrier, N. Gerald (ed.), *The Sikh Diaspora* (Delhi, 1989), p. 51.
- 65 (Lt. General) Goodenough, W.H. and (Lt. Col.) Dalton, J.C.; *The Army Book Forthe British Empire* (London, 1893), p. 447.
- 66 Kerr, J. Ian; 'Fox and the Lions; The Akali Movement Revisited' in O' Connel,

- T. Joseph, Isral, Milton et. al. (ed.); *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto, 1988), p. 216.
- 67 The Khalsa Advocate, December 15, 1904
- 68 File No. 942- 1922, *Home-Political, The Sikh Question in the Punjab, Section 7 (N.A.I); Ludhiana Gazetteer 1888-89, Chapter III C, p. 72; Punjab Legislature Council Debates-8th January to 16th April 1921, Vol . I, p.546.*
- 69 Phillauri, Sharda Ram (Pandit); *Sikhan De Raj Di Vithya* (Jalandhar, 1956), p42 (ed.) Pritam Singh; Gill, Harbans Kaur, *Sharda Ram Phillauri*, (Patiala, 1976), p. 19.
- 70 Pritam Singh; Ibid., p.43; Balbir Singh; *Charn Hari Visthar* (Amritsar n.d.), Part I, pp. 63-64. *Gurdwara Gazettee*, Amritsar, August 1953, p.9.
- 71 Court, Henry; *Sikhan De Raj Di Vithiya* (Patiala, 1970), p.8
- 72 Ganda Singh; *A History of the Khalsa College, Amritsar* (Amritsar, 1949), p. 2; *The Khalsa Advocate*, Amritsar, September 20, 1903. want Singh; *op. cit.*, Vol.I, p. 129.
- 74 Khushwant Singh; Ibid. P. 145.
- 75 Ibid., p. 127 (n)
- 76 Ludhiana Gazetteer, 1888-89, Chapter III-C, p. 72.
- 77 Report of the Singh Sabha, Patiala, 1880 pp.5-6.
- 78 Shri Gurmat Parkash, Rawalpindi, September, 1885.
- 79 Dhillon, G.S.; 'Origin and Development of the Singh Sabha Movement; Constituional Aspects' in Ganda Singh (ed.); *The Singh Sabha And other Socio-Religious Movements in The Punjab 1850-1925; The Panjab Past and Present, Vol.VII, Part I, April, 1973, Serial No. 13, Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 50-51.*
- 80 Singh Sabha Amritsar; Niyam (Amritsar, 1890), p.1; Report on the Administration of The Punjab and Its Dependencies For 1897- 98 (Lahore, 1898); No.62, p. ccxix; Ganda Singh; *op.cit.*, p.2; Dhillon, G.S.; Character and Impact of The Singh Sabha Movement on the History of the Punjab (Ph.D. Thesis, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1973), p.54
- 81 Sahni, 'Ruchi Ram; The Gurdwara Refor Movement and the Sikh Awakening (Jullundur, 1922), p. 150.
- 82 Vihiria, Avtar Singh (Bhai); Shok Pattar (Lahore, 1905), p. 38.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 Khalsa Akhbar, lahore, April 14, 1899.
- 85 Sahni, Ruchi Ram; *op. cit.*, p. 150;  
Vihiria, Avtar Singh(Bhai); Gurdarshan Shastar  
(Amritsar, 1916), pp.12-13; *Vihiria Shok Pattar*, p. 38.
- 86 *Khalsa Akhbar*, Lahore, September 30, 1898.
- 87 Chief Khalsa Diwan; *Seva De Panjah Sal* (Amritsar, 1952), p.2;

- Dhillon, G.S. ; *op.cit.*, p. 58.
- 89 Report of the Singh Sabha, Patiala. 1906) pp.1-5
- 90 Gurmukh Singh (Bhai); *My Attempted Ex-Communication From The Sikh Temples and The Khalsa Community at Faridkot in 1897* (Lahore, 1898), p. 12.
- 91 *Ibid.*
- 92 *Ibid.*
- 93 Patrie, D. *op. cit.* in *The Punjab Past and Present* Vol. IV Part II (Patiala, October 1970), Sahnis Ruchi Ram *op. cit.*, p. 15; Gurmukh Singh (Bhai); *op.cit.*, pp. 2-3.
- 94 *Ibid.*
- 95 *Ibid.*
- 96 Durga Parsad; *An English Translation of the Satyarth Parkash* (Lahore, 1904), pp.361-63; Ganda Singh; 'The Origins of the Hindu-Sikh Tension in the Punhjab', in *The Journal of Indian History*, Vol. XXIV, April, 1961, pp. 121-23; The Khalsa Akhbar, Lahore, July 7, 1899; Lakshman Singh, Bhagat; *Autobiography* (Calcutta, 1965), p. 58; Vaid, Mohan Singh (Bhai); *Arya De Dhol Da pol* (Taran Taran, 1915), p.14.
- 97 Majumdar, R.C. (ed.); *History and Culture of the Indian People*. Vol X (Bombay, 1965), p. 103.
- 98 Smith, R. Bosworth; *Life of Lord Lawrence* (London, 1883), Vol. I, p. 287.
- 99 Temple, Richard; *India In 1880* (London, 1881), p. 120.
- 100 Chief Kbalsa Di wan; *Rules and Regulations of the Chief Khalsa Diwan* (Amritsar, 1904), p. 1.
- 101 "I had come to regard the Khalsa College, Amritsar, as Government College minus Government Discipline. No member had a free hand in it, hence it was idle to think of doing any constructive work without the previous sanction of the Government". Lakshman Singh, Bhagat; *op. cit.*, p. 203.
- 102 Ahulwalia, M.L. (ed.); *Select Documents- GurdwaraReform Movement 1919-1925* (New Delhi, 1985), Introduction, p. xxiii.
- 103 Sunder Singh, Master; *Ki Khalsa kalaj Sikhan DaHai?* (Amritsar, 1909), pp. 30-37.
- 104 A Petrie D.; *op. cit.* in *Gurdwara Gazettes*, p. 45; Isemonger, F.C.and Slattery, J.; *An Account of the Chadr Conspiracy, 1913-15* (Lahore, 1919), p. 19.
- 105 Petrie, D.; *op. cit.*, pp. 37-39.
- 106 *Ibid.*; Dhillon; *op.cit.*; p. 284.
- 107 Petrie, D. *Ibid.*, p.46.
- 108 *Ibid.*
- 109 *Ibid.*, pp. 46-48.
- 110 *Ibid.*
- 111 Talwar, K.S.; 'Early Phases of The Sikh Renaissance and Struggle For Freedom' In *Punjab Past and Present* (Patiala, October 1970), p. 295.

- 112 Ibid.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 Ibid
- 115 Barrier; *The Sikhs and Their Literature* (Delhi, 1970), p. 79.
- 116 *Khalsa Samachar*, Amritsar, December 23,1908.
- 117 Sahni, Ruchi Ram; *op. cit.*, p. 466; Narang, Gokul Chan; *Transformation of Sikh ism* (Lahore, 1946), p. 321.
- 118 Government of India; Home Department, *Judicial No. 950*, June 25,1914, Simla;  
Government of India; Home Department, *Judicial No. 1118*, July 17, 1914, Simla;  
Government of India; Home Department,  
*Judicial NO. 2248*, October, 1914, Simla (N.A.I.);  
Teja Singh; *op. cit.*, p. 208;  
Ganda Singh; 'Exemption of Kirpan From Restrictions Under the Arms Act'  
in *Punjab Past and Present* Vol. VII, Part I (Punjabi University, Patiala, April 1973), pp  
162-172.
- 119 Teja Singh; *Ibid*, p. 209.
- 120 McLeod, W.H.; *The Sikhs; History, Religion and Society* (New York, 1989), p. 8.
- 121 Fox, Richard; *op. cit.* pp.208-210.
122. Barrier, N Gerald; *Sikh Emigrants and Their Homeland in Dusenbery*, Verne A. and Barrier  
N. Gerald (ed.); *The Sikh Diaspora* (Delhi, 1989), p. 51.
- 123 Semonger, F.C. and Slattery, j.; *op.cit.*, pp. 2-4.
- 124 Talwar, K.S.; *op. cit.* pp. 293-94.
- 125 Patrie, D.; *op.cit.*, p. 325.
- 126 Punjab Administrative Report (1921-22). Vol.I, p.238.
- 127 Caveeshar, Sardul Singh; 'The Akali Movement' in *Punjab Past and Present*, Vol. VII, Part I  
(Punjabi university, Patiala, April 1973), p.120.128 *Ibid*.
- 129 Ibid
- 130 Jagjit Singh; *Ghadr Party Lehr* (Delhi, 1976) pp. 47, 204.
- 131 *Ibid.*, pp.51-52.
- 132 Isemonger, F.C. and Slattery, j.; *op.cit.* pp. 2-3, 37.
- 133 *Ibid*.
- 134 Ibid.
- 135 Harding, Charles; *My Indian Years, 1910-16* (London 1947), p. 115.
- 136 Khushwant singh; *op.cit.* Vol. IIp. 179 (28 n)
- 137 Caveeshar, Sardul Singh; *op. cit.*, pp. 120. 137.
- 138 Government of India; *Home-Political-* November, 1914- Pro. No. 100; Caveeshar,*op. cit.*,  
p. 121.
- 139 *Punjab Administrative Report* (1921-22), Vol.I, pp. 238-39
- 140 Caveeshar; *op. cit.*, p.87
- 141 Ibid

- 142 Alhuwalia; *op.cit.*, p. 87.
- 143 Purl, Rajinder; *Rediscovery of India* (New Delhi), 1984, pp. 112-13.
- 144 Mittal, S.C.; *Freedom Movement in Punjab (1905-29)* (Delhi 1977), pp. 82, 143.
- 145 Purl, Rajinder; *op. cit.*, p. 110.
146. Datta, V.N.; Inaugural Address At the 24th Session of Punjab History Conference, Punjabi University, Patiala, 15-17 March, 1991.
- 147 Grewal, J.S. and Puri, H.K.; *Udham Singh Dian Chithian*, (Amritsar 1974), pp. 58, 60-61.
- 148 *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.
- 149 *Punjab Administrative Report* (1921-22), Vol. I, pp. 238-39.
- 150 Mohinder Singh; *The Akali Movement* (Delhi 1978), p.14.
- 151 Ahluwalia, M.L., *op. cit.*, p. 89.
- 152 Khushwant Singh, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 165-66.
- 153 *Ibid.*
- 154 *Ibid*
- 155 Josh, Sohan Singh, *Akali Morchian Da Itihas* (Delhi 1972), p. 28.
- 156 Mohinder Singh, *op.cit.* pp. 87-88.
- 157 Punjab Administrative Report, 1921-22, Vol. I, p. 351.
- 158 Smith, V.M., 'The Akali Dal and Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (1921- 22)', A Confidential Memorandum in *Punjab Past and Present* (Punjabi University, Patiala, October 1967), Vol. I, Part II, p. 279.
- 159 Gaveeshar, *op.cit.*, p. 141.
- 160 Gurbax Singh, *Society in The Punjab Under Ranjit singh; Mufti-Ali-ud-Din's Analysis in Punjab History Conference Proceedings*, February 28- 29, 1976 (Patiala, 1976), pp. 135-37.
- 161 Roth, Cool, *Short History of the Jewish People* (Glasgow 1948), pp. 110-112.

## SIKH IDENTITY: A CONTINUING FEATURE

GURDARSHAN SINGH DHILLON

1. *Introduction:*

In recent years some western writers as also a few Indian writers, particularly sociologists and historians, while writing about Sikh religion, its injunctions, doctrines and practices have made two fundamentally fallacious observations by calling Sikhism a tradition and a pluralistic religion. Such descriptions, apart from being doctrinally incorrect, give an entirely wrong image of the fundamentals of the religion and the Sikh society as a whole. In this paper, we intend clarifying the issue by showing that Sikhism is not only a well-defined religion but is far from being pluralistic. To out-siders not acquainted with Sikhism such misrepresentations might seem plausible because Hinduism with its innumerable sects and cults and undefined doctrines has generally been taken to be a tradition and a pluralistic system. But for scholars in India there could hardly be a ground for confusion about Sikhism. Another two factors have also led to such loose statements even in the academic field. First, studies in sociology and anthropology have become so specialised and narrow in scope that scholars sometimes lose the overall perspective. Unfortunately, after Independence the political factor and the ensuing tensions have also led to some skewing of visions:.

We have taken up this issue because in the writings of W.H. Mcleod <sup>1</sup>, Rajiv Kapur<sup>2</sup> and in papers contributed at Berkley (U.S.A.) and Toronto (Canada), an entirely wrong perspective has been presented. Our essay deals with, as a case study, the paper of H.S. Oberoi (presently in the Chair of Sikh and Punjabi studies at the University of British Columbia, Canada), read at the Conference held at Toronto in February, 1987 (published in the book, 'Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century' (Joseph T.O.)



Connell, Milton Israel, Willard G. Oxtoby, eds., with W.H. Mcleod and J.S. Grewal, visiting eds.), brought out by Center of South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 1988). We have chosen this paper, 'From Ritual to Counter-Ritual Rethinking the Hindu-Sikh Question, 1884-1915', because W.H. Mcleod's book, 'Who is A Sikh?', also suffers from the same drawback, which H.S. Oberoi<sup>3</sup> quotes liberally, and presents practically the same faulty and narrow point of view. Oberoi in the opening para of his paper writes, "Until then (late nineteenth century) the Sikhs had shown little collective interest in distinguishing themselves from the Hindus. Sikh notions of time, space, corporality, holiness, kinship, social distinctions, purity and pollution, and commensality were hardly different from those of the Hindus. Also the two shared the territory, language, rites de passage, dietary taboos, festivals, ritual personnel and key theological doctrines. The construction of personhood within the two traditions and their solutions for existential problems were quite alike. In brief, the semiotic" cultural, affective and territorial universe of the Sikhs, and Hindus was virtually identical.'<sup>4</sup>

The confusion in the paper starts from the very loose and incorrect connotations accepted by Oberoi of the words 'tradition', 'holiness', 'societal distinctions', 'purity' and 'pollution; 'commensality', 'key theological doctrines', etc. Oxford dictionary defines tradition as something which is supposed to have divine authority but is not committed to writing:- (1) Opinion or belief or custom handed down, from ancestors to posterity especially orally or by practice. (2) Theological doctrine etc. supposed to have divine authority but not committed to writing, especially. (a) laws held by Pharisees to have been delivered by God to Moses, (b) oral teaching of Christ and Apostles not recorded in writings by immediate disciples, (c) words and deeds of Muhammad not in Koran. .

## *2.Ideology:-*

In no religion of the world key theological doctrines, ideas of purity and pollution, holiness, societal distinctions, commensality, etc. have been more rigorously defined and authenticated than in the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth, which the Gurus call the revealed Words (Shabad)<sup>5</sup> But in making his descriptions in reference to theological ideas and doctrines, Oberoi completely distorts their meanings since he never makes any reference to the Guru Granth.

Because, a cultural practice or the acceptance of an idea, if contrary to the injunctions in the scripture, is an aberration and can never be deemed to redefine the doctrine or be made the basis of the presence of a deviant group.

Oberio's basic fault is that he neither defines Sikhism nor clarifies how a deviant practice forms the faith of a pluralistic group in Sikhism. For, in a religion, persons violating the vows of marriage are not taken to form a new sect of that religion, or a pluralistic group. Therefore, in order to show the contrast between Sikhism and Hinduism, and the two societies, it is necessary to state briefly the fundamentals of the Sikh ideology and their difference from the doctrines of Hinduism. Significantly, the basic principles of Sikhism were defined by Guru Nanak and he also laid the foundations of its social structure.<sup>6</sup> The later Gurus, only developed that structure and built the Sikh Society clearly in pursuance of those principles. Guru Nanak is the first man in India, who broke the dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man and made an inalienable combination between the two. Further, in the Japuji he defines 'who is a Sikh' and 'how to be a Sikh' by saying that to be a true person (*Sachiaara*) and break the wall of darkness, obstructing man's vision one has to carry out His Will, the same being Altruistic.<sup>7</sup> It is this clear definition that brought about a fundamental departure from the earlier Indian religions, including Hinduism. At one stroke Guru Nanak made the following revolutionary changes; (1) Instead of the world being *Mithya*, or a suffering, he called it real.<sup>8</sup> (2) He rejected monasticism, asceticism and withdrawal from life and instead recommended total participation in life and acceptance of social responsibility.<sup>9</sup> (3) Instead of down-grading the status of woman in relation to spiritual life and recommending celibacy, he recommended a householder's life and equality of man and woman.<sup>10</sup> (4) Instead of the religious doctrine of *Varna Ashram Dharma* and consequent rules of caste, pollution, social segregation and professional immobility, he accepted equality of all men.<sup>11</sup> (5) He rejected *Ahimsa* as an inviolable religious doctrine.<sup>12</sup> (6) Instead of life negation he recommended life affirmation in all fields of life.<sup>13</sup> (7) In his ethical monotheism, the Guru Granth clearly denies the idea of *Avatars* and their worship, including those of gods and goddesses.<sup>14</sup> (8) Instead of religion being a matter of personal devotion and salvation, he, because of his fundamental doctrine of combining the spiritual with the empirical, organised a society in

which promotion or defence of righteousness became essential.<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly Guru Nanak not only organised a society but the created a system of succession so as to develop it on the lines of his thesis. Hence the clear differences between Hindu and Sikh societies, their value systems and social practices. The call Guru Nanak gave to every seeker was, "If you want to tread the path of love, then enter upon my path with your head on your palm".<sup>16</sup>

Guru Nanak's successors from the second Guru onwards created various institutions of *Manjis* and *Masands*, centres of Sikh organisation, etc. For, according to Guru Nanak, he was a prophet ordained to carry out a mission. The Sikh Gurus thus weaned away the Sikhs from the old Hindu society and created new motivations among their followers to pursue the mission. Exactly the same words as of Guru Nanak were spoken by Guru Arjan when Bhai Manj, a *Sakhi Sarvaria*, came to seek his advice. The Guru's reply is very revealing of the Sikh thesis. He said, "You may go on with the easy path of *Sakhi Sarvar* worship, because Sikhism is a very difficult path and unless you are willing to be dispossessed of your wealth and to sacrifice your very life, it is no use coming to me." But Bhai Manj did become a Sikh.<sup>17</sup> Guru's statement made two things very clear, namely, the risk and sacrifices involved in following the Sikh faith, and, secondly, that a dual loyalty to Sikhism and to any other religious system was out of question. The Sixth Guru while creating the institution of Akal Takhat only institutionalised the fundamental doctrine of Guru Nanak combining spiritual and empirical lives of man. Guru Hargovind made it clear to Sant Ram Das that he was simply pursuing the mission of Guru Nanak.<sup>18</sup> Guru Nanak's mission of creating whole men' motivated to accept total responsibility in respect of all spheres of life (*Sant Sipahi* ideal) was continued by the subsequent four Gurus till Guru Gobind Singh did the epitomic work of creating the Khalsa, closing the line of personal Gurus and entrusting the ideological Guruship to the *Shabad'* (*Guru Granth*). He directed the *Khalsa* to shoulder the total responsibility of defending and pursuing righteousness and justice. It is extremely significant that demand for total commitment to the mission, and willingness to sacrifice everything for the cause was the same as had been made by Guru Nanak and repeated by Guru Arjan to Bhai Manj. Just like Guru Arjan, Guru Gobind Singh also made it clear by his *Nash* doctrine that multiple loyalties and plurality of beliefs were out of question in Sikhism.<sup>19</sup> The only difference was that

whereas both the Khalsa and non-Khalsa Sikhs were Sikhs, every Sikh was not a member of the Khalsa till he had made the necessary commitment required by the Tenth Master.

### 3. *Faults in the Assumptions and Methodology of Oberoi:*

This conclusion is evident so far as the doctrines were concerned, everything laid down in the Guru Granth was final and unalterable. Secondly, that so far as plurality is concerned one could only be a Sikh or a Khalsa with unalloyed loyalty to the Scripture. Accordingly, there is no scope for accepting any doctrine of 'holiness', 'theology', 'rituals', 'practices', 'customs' and rites', variant from those embodied in the Guru Granth. Nor is there any scope for plurality of sects and sub-sects, tradition and sub-tradition, big tradition and small tradition in any sense different from the Sikhs and Khalsa defined above. Accordingly, it is ridiculous for Oberoi to call groups like Udasis, Suthreshahis, Sangatshahi, Jitmalis, Bakhatmalis, Mihanshahis, Sarvarias, etc. as lying within the framework of the Sikh faith.<sup>20</sup> Further examination of Oberoi's paper will proceed in the light of the doctrinal position stated above.

Oberoi's statement that, "In the absence of centralized Church and an attendant religious hierarchy, heterogeneity in religious beliefs, plurality of rituals, and diversity of life styles were freely acknowledged."<sup>21</sup> is obviously baseless. For elimination of the Brahminical hierarchy was a major achievement of the Sikh Gurus. However, there was no bar to attending festivals, fairs, or be a part of institutions so long that partaking was not incongruous with the doctrines of the Gurus. The Sikh cosmology stood well defined and there was only a single Sikh identity impossible of variation or transgression. It is strange that without defining Sikhism Oberoi writes, "Most Sikhs moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as residents of this village, at another as members of that cult, at one moment as part of this lineage, at another as part of that caste and yet another as belonging to a "Sect". The boundaries between what could be seen as the centre of the Sikh tradition and its periphery were highly blurred". There simply was no single source of authority within the Sikh tradition and thus several competing definitions of what constituted a "Sikh" were possible".<sup>22</sup>

We have indicated the definition laid down by the Gurus both for Sikhism and a Sikh. It makes it also clear how essential was Guru Gobind Singh's step of Amrit ceremony and the related *Nash*

doctrine clearly defining the Sikh. In this context Oberoi's statements about Sikhism and Sikh identity are just unwarranted by facts. He makes another observation, borrowed from Arya Samaj writings of the late 19th Century, that Sikh separatism was the result of economic competition between Sikh and Hindu middle classes and it had some backing from the British. He gives no evidence whatsoever to support his observations regarding the supposed competition and the economic distress. With this preamble, he proceeds to make a detailed description of some social and superstitious practices prevalent in Punjab.

Before we proceed to examine his statements regarding the Hindu and Sikh societies, it is necessary to expose the basically wrong assumptions in his preamble and his method of study. All social studies if those remain unrelated to earlier periods or religious doctrines, and are done in isolation for a narrow period of time would be distortion, unless they appropriately give some background of the societies that are under study. This is far more true of emerging religious societies, especially prophetic religions that make a major and radical departure from the earlier religious societies. Oberoi's paper makes an entirely baseless assumption that for four hundred years before the end of the 19th century the Hindus and the Sikhs formed one society. This means that in those four hundred years there was a single and peaceful Hindu society without any major historical events. In short, he makes a complete black out of the Sikh epoch, the Sikh Scripture and its radical doctrines, the ten Gurus and their mission, the Sikh society and a century of its persecution and revolt, and the phenomenal achievements of the Guru and the Sikhs in those four hundred years. No student of social history can ignore the radical regeneration brought about by the Sikh Gurus by introducing the creative institution of martyrdom, practically unknown to the Indian society. No understanding of the 19th Century Sikh society is possible without a clear grasp of its religion, history and achievements. Obviously, this gross omission, by Oberoi, evidently deliberate, vitiates his entire paper and shows its motivated slant.

What we have emphasised above is the presence of an entirely new Sikh society with radically different motivations, Ideals and ethos as separate from the old Hindu society. Those motivations and ethos were created by the Gurus through the glorious institution of martyrdom over a period of more than two

hundred years. In the early 18th Century started the period of Sikh revolt, struggle, intense persecution by the state, ending finally in triumphs of the Sikhs and their freedom from socio-political oppression. Sikh society alone went through this fire of turbulations and trials. It is during this period of four hundred years, that their ideological, social, ethical and cultural separateness from the Hindu society was defined and welded clearly. But all this has been naively ignored by Oberoi.

After their success came the fifty years of Sikh rule in the Punjab. Some facts and features of this period are necessary to state. Apart from the fact that power brought some weaknesses, it also drew the flock of fair-weather friends, who had stood clearly apart during the earlier centuries, especially the Century of struggle and persecution, but for the first time entered the Sikh fold to reap benefits of the Sikh Raj. Here some demographic facts are extremely important. During the Guru period the question of plurality of Sikhs did not and could not arise because Sikhism was led and defined by the Gurus themselves. In the 18th Century when there was price on Sikh heads, and thrice it was reported that all Sikhs had been exterminated,<sup>23</sup> the chances of plurality of faith were still less. It was a completely homogenous society with singleness of faith, with its members ready to sacrifice their all as desired by the call of the Gurus. It is this history of persecution, struggle and martyrdoms that welded the Sikh society with a unity of ideals, ethos and practices entirely different from the surrounding Hindu society. We have given this background, because in the 18th Century the population of Sikhs was once reported to be only twenty thousand<sup>24</sup> but in the period of Ranjit Singh it rose to the peak figure of 10-11 lacs. <sup>25</sup> We just wanted to indicate that it is naturally these converts of convenience, who formed a significant part of the Sikh Community in the second half of the 19th Century.<sup>26</sup> These were drawn largely from the Hindu society, who naturally did not shed straight away many parts of their earlier practices. The characters of these two segments of the Sikh society were found notably different by discerning observers.

John Malcolm in his book, 'Sketch of the Sikhs', published in 1810, writes, "The character of the *Sikhs*, or rather *Sinhs*, which is the name by which the followers of Guru Govind, who are all devoted to arms, are distinguished, is very marked. The Sikh identity is shared by the Sikh merchant, or cultivator, of the soil, if he is a *Sinh*, not merely by the soldiers who so conspicuously

paraded it. The 'followers of Guru Govind or Khalsa Sikhs are clearly distinguished.' Another category of Sikhs whom he calls *Khalasa* Sikhs he considers them quite different in character. "Their character differs widely from that of the *Sinhs*. Full of intrigue, pliant, versatile and insinuating, they have all the art of the lower classes of Hindus, who are usually employed in transacting business; from whom, indeed, as they have no distinction of dress, it is difficult to distinguish them.,,"<sup>27</sup> A similar distinction is made by Forester and J.D. Cunningham. Malcolm also indicates *Nanak Putras*, who were Bedi descendents of the family of Guru Nanak from Lakhmi Das?<sup>28</sup> It is these *Nanak Putras* who because of the favours gained by them during the Sikh rule, later continued the practice of personal following among Sikhs and Hindus, a practice distinctly censured by the Gurus.

It is in this context of a distinct and radical difference between the Hindu and the Sikh societies of the earlier three centuries that we proceed to examine the sociological observations made by Oberoi in the rest of his paper. He has prefaced his description with the wholly incorrect statement that in the earlier four hundred years, the Sikhs and the Hindus formed a single homogenous society and the gap was created by the Singh Sabha on account of economic competition among the middle classes and stringency of resources among the traders and agriculturists. We have indicated the serious methodological fault of Oberoi and his deliberate exclusion of important facts about the earlier period of Sikh history and Sikh struggles and achievements. Religious societies are formed only if they have an ideology and successfully emerge out of the fire of persecution. It is these struggles and the institution of martyrdom for the faith which frame and mould their character. Students of history know that there would have been no Christian religion or society unless the followers of Christ had gone through decades of persecution and shown their defiant response of suffering and martyrdoms in the early two hundred years. A view is held even today that Christ never wanted to create a religion separate from Judaism, but it is his martyrdom and the subsequent response of his followers, the Christians, who created Christianity, and the Christian society.

We have to make another general observation. Anything not prescribed by the Sikh scripture or the Gurus, a Sikh is not barred from practising in relation to his social and cultural life. But something barred by the Scripture or the Gurus or contrary to clear

injunctions is an aberration and its practice by some cannot indicate plurality of the Sikh faith or constitute a sect of the Sikh society. Sinners and adulterers are there in every religious society but they form no sect of the faith. We have noted this point because in his description of practices, Oberoi makes no distinction between sanctioned and unsanctioned practices, thereby creating confusion and obliterating the line between cultural practices and aberrations. .

Here we might also record that rituals and ceremonies are, broadly speaking, of three kinds:

(1) Acts or rituals performed as the result of religious or ethical injunctions of the concerned faith. (2) Those which cater to customs or social practice unrelated to any particular faith. (3) Utilitarian practices following mundane needs of the local society. Oberoi in describing his rituals has neither indicated the extent of their prevalence nor related them to religious injunctions of the Sikhs, Hindus or Muslims. The Punjab society of the times was constituted of about 52% Muslims, about 12% Sikhs and the remaining were Hindus. *Sakhi Sarvar* was a Muslim Pir from the largely Muslim populated area of Punjab. His following among the Muslims was naturally the largest, numerous of his followers were Hindus.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. *Examination of Oberoi's Paper:--*

Now we proceed to examine his paper which suffers from lack of methodology substituted by irrelevant profusion of details, thereby creating confusion and drawing inferences unsupported by precise facts. In his opening paras Oberoi again makes a curious statement that cultural practices were not "an extension of their religious traditions, but were embedded in a complex idiom of kinship, patron-client relationships and asymmetrical reciprocity."<sup>30</sup> In the background we have explained how obvious is his misstatement that, "Religion, I would like to argue, is not, as has often been assumed, a key to understanding the pre-British society."

<sup>31</sup> He makes a similar misstatement when he says that, "In the Indian religious tradition, unlike the Judeo-Christian, there was no notion of a well-demarcated religious community possessing a centralized ecclesiastical hierarchy. People did not conceive of themselves simply as "Hindus" or "Sikhs" <sup>32</sup> Anyone with the knowledge of Brahmanism would find such statements to be just groundless. For, Brahminical rules rigidly governed every phase and act of life whether religious, social or cultural; and Brahmins



were the exclusive agency to supervise and conduct all related acts and ceremonies concerning human interests. Brahmanism and Brahmin hierarchy have been considered the bane of the Hindu society. Guru Nanak and the Sikh Gurus purposely rejected both. But Oberoi brands this as the elimination of a necessary feature of a society. Again it is Oberoi's complete ignorance of the Sikh religion when he says that religion is for the individual salvation of man.<sup>33</sup> It is a Hindu idea that was specifically discarded by the Gurus by creating and organising a separate religious system in which social responsibility and social salvation of man were an essential part, following Gurus' doctrine of combining the spiritual and the empirical concerns of man.<sup>34</sup> This combination exists both in Sikhism and Islam which distinguishes them radically from the other societies in the East where the dichotomy between the spiritual and the empirical continues, creating thereby a wide gap between the householders and recluses who openly withdraw from the social sphere to seek personal salvation.<sup>35</sup> The observations of Oberoi show his complete ignorance both of the Sikh religion and its society and the Hindu religion and its society. In the Hindu society there is a wide social and cultural gap between its main stream and its saints, *yogis*, *sanyasis* and other religious groups pursuing *Moksha*. That is why Maitra's study of Hindu ethics clearly concludes that the ethical injunctions of that religion hardly relate to the empirical, social or cultural life of the society. His ignorance also explains his observation that religion was a highly localised affair. For that reason his views based on studies in South Asia or peasant societies elsewhere are quite irrelevant in respect of the Sikh Society in Punjab.

Seen in the light of our observations, and in the background of the prophetic and monumental work of the ten Gurus in creating a new religion and organising the Sikh society, and the extreme sacrifices the Sikhs made to maintain their identity created by the Gurus in the earlier centuries, it is ridiculous for Oberoi to assume that, "religion as a systematized sociological unit claiming unbridled loyalty for its adherents is a relatively recent development in the history of the Indian peoples. Once this phenomenon surfaced, probably sometimes in the nineteenth century, it rapidly evolved, gained wide support and became reified in history. Out of this reification process it easily turned into something separate, distinct and concrete; what we to-day recognise as Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism:<sup>36</sup> Though the

phraseology is slightly different, in essence Oberoi is voicing the views of a Hindu scholar who says, "But when it comes to the Indians belonging to religions which originated in India, such as Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, many a Hindu regard them as downright unpatriotic or unspiritual or both if they wish to maintain their distinct identity from the Hindus.." <sup>37</sup> And so far as Parkash Tandon's statement, Oberoi quotes, we have already noted the phenomenon of certain Hindu castes entering the Sikh fold during the period of Ranjit Singh. "From the fact that Hindus and Sikhs shared positions within a single social structure, and from the "peculiar" nature of religion in Indian society, there flowed an important consequence: the religious categories "Hindu" and "Sikh" were ambiguous, fluid and fragile." <sup>38</sup> This is not correct, because the distinction continued right through the 19th century as observed by Malcolm except for the new entrants, who entered because of socio-political considerations.

As for the *Sutak* and other such superstitious practices, we have to state that the *Guru Granth* clearly deprecates this and other *Chhut* practices in the Hindu societies. The difficulty is that in making his observations, Oberoi seems to make a deliberate confusion by neither giving the extent of those practices nor of making a distinction whether or not such practices were confined only to Hindu castes. He concedes that in the case of the birth ceremony, the child was named by a Sikh *Granthi* and Sikh prayers were made. Vague and general statements like, "There was an immense variation in ceremonial not only among the different castes of Sikhs but also within caste groups among Sikhs of different localities." <sup>39</sup> are numerous in the paper of Oberoi. There are also statements concerning the employment of messengers (*Prohit* or *Nai*) from certain castes. Similarly, many cultural features like the use of drums, singing and dancing are equally without any meaning and consequence. Since in every society there are local cultural practices that contravene no religious injunctions. These have no relevance for our discussion.

It is well known, and Oberoi concedes it, that Guru Amar Das distinctly provided for the Sikh society separate non-superstitious practices, regarding birth, marriage and death ceremonies. <sup>40</sup> The disappearance of Hindu practices during the Guru period and the revolutionary period has been evident and their re-appearance in the 19th Century among some sections of the neo-converts is understandable. In all his statements Oberoi seems purposely to

have avoided indicating their extent. The only practice about which there is some evidence of its extent, is about *Sakhi Sarvarias* who were only 3% among the Sikhs,<sup>41</sup> and Oberoi mentions it as an evidence of Sikh pluralism. The argument is ridiculous, for, it is Guru Arjan who stated that one could either be a Sikh or a *Sakhi Sarvana*. Followers of *Sakhi Sarvar*, a Muslim saint, formed a separate sect. It is known that this Muslim practice, was quite common even in the Hindu society and later was also brought in the Sikh society when in the 19th Century sections of the Hindus accepted Sikhism. Therefore, such aberrations, unsanctioned by the Sikh Gurus, disappeared progressively. But it proves pluralism neither of Islam nor of Sikhism. So far as the Sikh society of the 18th Century is concerned, the observations of Malcolm and others are unambiguous. By the Amrit ceremony the tenth Guru obliterated all distinctions of caste and the rest, thereby separating Sikhs from the Hindus. The Guru's intention found expression in the initiation ceremony and those who understand the meaning of that ceremony will appreciate that Guru Gobind Singh had separated his followers for ever from the Hindus. The Singhs, Akalis and Shahids strictly observed the injunctions of the Gurus. Obviously, those who sacrificed their all for their religion and its symbols would not indulge in any Hindu practice prohibited by the Gurus. It is also meaningless for Oberoi to quote Barbara Myershoff and Sally Falk Moore to suggest that, "ritual practices help people to overcome indeterminacy in life."<sup>42</sup> The argument is irrelevant concerning the Sikhs whom the Gurus had given a new scripture and a distinct identity regarding their form and beliefs, including ceremonies for birth, marriage and death. If Brahmins or others were employed for ancillary purposes that hardly affected the identity of the Sikhs.

The most revealing part of Oberoi's paper, which virtually demolishes the entire structure of his argument, is when he says, "All this, no doubt, can be qualified to some extent. Within the pluralistic framework of Sikh tradition in the nineteenth century there was a significant khalsa 'sub-tradition' that did not blend very well with the amorphous state of the Sikh faith. The Khalsa Sikhs had their own notion of what constituted the Sikh past and more importantly they possessed a distinct life style ritual in the form of *Khande-da-Phahul* or baptism rites. Those who underwent this rite had to maintain the five well-known symbols of the Khalsa and in addition strictly to observe the injunctions laid down in the

*rahit-namas* or manuals of conduct.<sup>43</sup> “These manuals most clearly manifest the aspirations and ethos of the Khalsa sub-tradition. They visulised a considerably deritualized Sikhism, shorn of polytheism, idolatry and Brahmanical dominance. But a great deal of historical and linguistic research needs to be carried out before we can be sure how precisely the *rahit-nama* texts related to the aspirations of the Khalsa. However, one point is clear: in many ways the *rahit-nama* literature foreshadowed the homogenous Sikh identity and religious boundaries of the late nineteenth century.”<sup>44</sup>

The existence of the body of Sikhs whom he calls Khalsa, he cannot conceal. But nothing can be a bigger distortion than, for Oberoi to state that the community which the Gurus created, led and motivated for over two hundred years, whom they gave a new Scripture fully governing their religious and empirical life, to build whom the Gurus suffered unparalleled martyrdoms, and who went through a century of struggle, involving extreme sacrifices and persecutions at the hands of the state were only a ‘sub-tradition’ of the amorphous Sikh faith. Either the Guru Granth embodies doctrines of an amorphous faith or there was in existence another Scripture conveying the tenets of that amorphous faith. Oberoi’s statements in this para cross all bounds of sense when he states that the practices of the Khalsa or the statement in *Rahit-namas* embodied aspirations of the Khalsa and not the epitomic work and injunctions of the ten Gurus in creating the Sikh religion. For him the creation of the Sikh religion and the Sikh society by the Gurus, whom he calls the Khalsa,’ and its self perception of having a distinct religious identity, has no meaning unless the same is accepted by the Hindus or the rest of the population of the province. Another misstatement of Oberoi is that Sikhs comprised two sections, those who took Amrit or aspired to take *Khande-Di-Pahul*, and those who took *Charan-Pahul*. After 1708 A.D. when the Tenth Master passed away, who were the Sikhs getting the *Charan Pahul* and who was the Guru whose *Charan Pahul* they were getting to baptise them as Sikhs and where were those Sikhs and Gurus during the 18th Century, when Sikhs of the ten Masters, whether *Amrit-Dhari* or otherwise were fighting their life and death struggle. Evidently, these new Gurus and their followers like mushrooms of the rainy season appeared only in the rule of the *Sarkar-i-Khalsa*. It has already been noted that in the second half of the 19th Century this tribe of the Gurus and Sikhs

continued their trade of having Hindu followers on grounds of their being *Nanak-Putras* through Lakhmi Das. And it is this very group who later appeared in the Amritsar Singh Sabha whom Oberoi calls genuine Sikhs<sup>45</sup> and their practices in violation of the Sikh religion as authentic and valid, forming the 'Great tradition', and Sikhs of the ten Gurus as the 'little or small tradition'. Such gross misstatements have hardly ever been made before in academic discussion.

The next part of Oberoi's essay is based on the validity of these premises and assumptions. For, he clearly argues that the Singh Sabhas that tried to revive the Sikhism of the Gurus (or the small tradition) by invoking the injunctions of Guru Granth, were innovators, thereby destroying Sikhism of the *Charan Ka Pahul* Sikhs and their Gurus (great tradition) whose history is non-existent in the earlier four centuries. In making such statements Oberoi has surpassed all records of "Gobellian truths".

All Oberoi's inferences suggest that his study lacks reliable information, depth and objectivity, and he draws conclusions that have no rational basis. His bias and ignorance of Sikh religion and history are too obvious to be concealed. Vagueness and confusion are a specific feature of his style and description. It is an evident fault for any precise academic discussion. He says that from among Sikhs two elites were fostered by colonialism. He does not indicate as to who they were, what was the origin of the members of each. He concedes that many members of one came from families and castes who enjoyed high ritual standing. He admits that the members of the opposite group were from the lower socio-economic strata, but they emerged as a power block the like of which "had not existed in the Sikh society."<sup>46</sup> He conceals the fact that the first elite, who had a higher social status, were exactly the ones who enjoyed favours and privileges from the British masters. And the others were persons drawn from what the Hindu society considered the lowest castes. He gives no reason whatsoever why the second group swept away the influence of the gilded gentry from among the Sikh masses. He conceals the truth, because if he told it, his entire house of cards he had structured would fall to pieces. The fact is that the second group with no socio-economic backing invoked the authority of Guru Granth, Sikh injunctions and the heroes of Sikh history, who had sacrificed their all to maintain the Sikh faith and its identity. The other group failed

because their stand was wholly contrary to the Sikh scripture and four hundred years of Sikh history. Some of the big ones of this group were *Nanak Putras* through Lakhmi Das who had never been a part of the Sikh society of the earlier centuries. They failed because their stand was as spurious as the arguments of Oberoi that Singh Sabha innovators created a new Sikhism entirely different from the Sikh religion & society the Gurus had structured during earlier four centuries.

It is very unfortunate that in making a misstatement or concealing a fact, Oberoi has no inhibitions, if it should serve his argument. An instance is his calling 'Prem Samarag' a mid-nineteenth century or a late *Reht-nama*. According to the established view of experts of Punjabi literature like Mohan Singh and S.S. Kohli and historians like J.S. Grewal and Randhir Singh 'Prem Samarag' is a production of the first quarter of the eighteenth century (near 1716-18) and it contains mention of Sikh practices of birth, marriage and death.<sup>47</sup> Oberoi conceals this fact because unless he did that the very basis of his paper alleging innovations on the part of Singh Sabha, and not revival of old Sikh practices, is completely knocked out. Use of such academic ethics is unfortunate. May be, Oberoi has followed Mcleod in the use of such tactics because Mcleod has also used the same method in avoiding the clear evidence of 'Prem Samarag'.<sup>48</sup> It only records the existence of those practices in the beginning of the 18th Century. Actually, these distinct practices about birth, marriage, and death were introduced during the time of the third and fourth Gurus.<sup>49</sup>

The issue in the paper is the commonness of Sikh religion and Hindu religion. The presence of numerous bards, genealogists, story-tellers, ministers, diviners and healers is hardly relevant since these categories catered to all members of the Punjab society composed of three religions. Nor is it relevant that myriad of *literary* traditions that were kept alive through oral texts. Islam is an exclusive religion with Quran as its sole guide. Similarly Sikhism has its authenticated and unalterable Scripture which has to be followed by every Sikh. Contravening its injunction is a clear aberration. Hinduism too has its scriptures but their interpretation and rites prescribed by custom are many. Hence reference to "little tradition" and practices or customs, social code, myths or legends unrelated to any religion, or not violative of Sikhism, have no meaning or relevance to our discussion. Here it is also necessary to state and emphasize that the category of "Sanatan Sikhs",

“Nanak Panthis” or like groups arose only in the 19th century when the umbrella of Sikh Raj became available.<sup>50</sup> They were never a part of the Sikh society either during the Guru period or during its struggle in the 18th century. The *Udasis* because of the ascetic tradition of Baba Sri Chand, never joined the Sikh society.<sup>51</sup> Udasis did take charge of the virtually vacant Sikh shrines and continued there undisturbed because even the Mughals considered them not to be a part of the Sikh society. In fact, because of the Udasis being ascetic celebrities and life negating, they remained distinctly demarcated from the Sikh society which is completely life affirming, socially responsible and anti-ascetic.<sup>52</sup> Rather, because of their being in many respects near the Hindu Synthesis and sects in their practices, they became the instrument of introducing Hindu practices at the Sikh shrines. Accordingly, removal of the Hindu idols from the Sikh shrines was natural. Whereas there are numerous hymns in the Guru Granth, rejecting, gods and goddesses and worship of idols,<sup>53</sup> Oberoi has not quoted a single hymn sanctioning their worship or any historical evidence of Hindu idols at the ‘Sikh shrines during the Guru period. As to Udasis, the story about Baba Gurditta becoming an Udasi ascetic is a myth. The evidence of *Mehma Parkash*, Gurbilas Patshahi Chevin and *Bansavli Nama* (K.S. Chibber) shows that Baba Gurditta married twice, had two sons and expired following a hunting incident.<sup>54</sup> *Even Parchian Seva Das*, written by an Udasi author, never mentions Baba Gurditta becoming a part of the Udasi tradition, which remained, because of its ideology, always outside the Sikh Panth. Infact, Chibber writing about Sikh Reht clearly records that Sikh, should never give up their religion and become Bairagis or ascetics, the two systems being contradictory.

Oberoi’s statement that the Hindu-Sikh religious differences appeared only in the nineteenth Century can only be made by one who places an iron curtain between the Singh Sabha period and the four hundred years of earlier Sikh history. The history of different religions show that generally a religion has flourished the most under its own flag, but never has a religion gained a new shape or identity after the fall of its political umbrella. Nothing can be more contrary to facts and history then the statement that after the loss of Ranjit Singh’s empire, the Singh Sabha created the miracle of a new religio-cultural system, with new definitions and a new identity and consciousness, without the sanction of its religious past and scripture.

### Conclusion :-

Anyone acquainted with the Sikh religion and its four hundred years of history knows that after the fall of the Sikh Raj and during a lean period of Sikh history, the Singh Sabha did a commendable task in steering the community to a safe harbour, thereby enabling it not to lose its socio-religious moorings, But the sole weapon it used was to ask the Sikhs to draw their inspiration and strength from the profound and great base of their religion and tradition the Gurus had created. The wisdom of the Singh Sabha leaders lay in deciding not to fight on two fronts, the political front in relation to the British and the socio-economic front facing the far too numerous Hindus and Muslims. The efforts and role of the Singh Sabha have to be understood and appreciated in their restoring the self confidence of the community and linking it firmly to their Gurus and religion.

It is indeed amazing that Oberoi has tried to raise a structure, which has entirely no basis in facts, logic or history. The reason for raising this phantom, simply does not exist in the field of academics and has therefore, to be found outside it in the domain of what Oberoi calls “material, pragmatic or economic interests.”

### REFERENCES

1. For details see two recent publications of W.H. Mcleod; *The Sikhs* (Columbia, 1988) and *Who Is A Sikh?* (Oxford, 1989).
2. Rajiv A. Kapur, *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith* (London, 1986).
3. Macleod, W.H; *Who Is A Sikh?*, pp.6S n.10, 68 n.22, 69 n.26, 72 n.11, 78 n.48, 79. n.49, 80n.50, 81 n.51.
4. Oberoi, H.5; *From Ritual to Counter- Ritual; Rethinking the Hindu-Sikh Question, 1884-1915* in O'Connell, T. Joseph et.al. *Sikh History and Religion in Twentieth Century* (Toronto, 1988), pp.136-137.
5. Daljeet Singh; *Essays On The Authenticity Of Kartarpuri Bir and The integrated Logic and Unity of Sikhism* (Patiala, 1987), pp.1,88.
6. “Any student of Sikhism and Sikh society cannot fail to notice how the Sikh Gurus, especially GuruNanak, Guru Arjun and Guru GobindSingh, were very sensitively awake to and critical of not only the social but also the political abuses and consequent miseries of people, which is another aspect of their attitude of social criticism and protest.”  
Ray, Niharranjan; *The Sikh Gurus and The Sikh Society* (Patiala, 1970), p.68.
7. "ਕਿਵਿ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੂੜੇ ਤੁਟੇ ਪਾਲਿ ।  
ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾਲਿ ॥"  
*Gpm Granth*, p.l.



8. "ਸਚੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਖੰਡ ਸਚੇ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡ ॥  
 ਸਚੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਲੋਅ ਸਚੇ ਆਕਾਰ ॥  
 ਸਚੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਕਰਣ ਸਰਬ ਬੀਚਾਰ ॥  
 .....  
 ਸਚੀ ਤੇਰੀ ਕੁਦਰਤ ਸਚੇ ਪਾਤਸਾਹਿ ॥  
 .....  
 ਇਹ ਜਗੁ ਸਚੇ ਕੀ ਹੈ ਕੋਠੜੀ ਸਚੈ ਕਾ ਵਿਚਿ ਵਾਸੁ ॥"  
*Guru Granth p.63.*
9. "ਵਿਚਿ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਸੇਵ ਕਮਾਈਐ  
 ਤਾਂ ਦਰਗਹ ਬੈਸਣੁ ਪਾਈਐ ॥"  
*Guru Granth p.26.*
10. "It is by woman, the condemned one, that we are conceived, and from her that we are born; it is with her that we are betrothed and married.  
 .....  
 Why should we call her inferior who gives birth to great men?" *Asa-di- Var*, quoted by Teja Singh; *Essays In Sikhism* (Lahore, 1944), p.65;  
 ਹੁਕਮੇ ਧਰਤੀ ਸਾਜੀਅਨ ਸੱਚੀ ਧਰਮਸਾਲਾ ॥  
*Guru Granth p.785.*  
 ਮਾਨਸ ਜਨਮੁ ਦੁਲਭ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਪਾਇਆ ॥  
*Guru Granth p.75.*
11. "Think not of race, abase thyself, and attain to salvation"  
 Nanak, *Adi Granth, Sarang Rag* (trans.) Cunningham, ).D; *History of the Sikhs* (new Delhi, 1966), p.334;  
 "The heart gets impure with greed, and the tongue with lying:  
 The eyes get impure by staring at another's wealth, his wife or her beauty;  
 The ears get impure by deavouring the slander of others.  
 Nanak, these impurities lead the soul of man bound to hell.  
 All other impurity supposed to be contracted from touch is superstitious.  
 Birth and death are ordained; we come and go by His will.  
 All eating and drinking, which God gave as sustenance, is pure.  
 Nanak, those who have realised this through the Guru do not believe in that impurity."  
*Asa-di-Var* (trans.)  
 Teja Singh, *Essays In Sikhism* (Lahore, 1944), pp.16-17
12. "Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat eating; they do not know what is flesh and what is non-flesh or in what lies sin and what is not sin." *Guru Granth*, pp.1289-90.
13. House-holders and hermits are equal, whoever calls on the name of the Lord."  
 Asa Ragni (Nanak from *Guru Granth*) (Trans.) Cunningham; *op.cit.*, p.334;  
 Touch not the feet of those, who call themselves *Gurus* and *pirs*, and go about begging.  
 They who eat the fruit of their own labour and share it with others are the

- poeple, Nanak, who have found the right way." *Var Sarang* (Trans.) Teja Singh; *op.cit.* p.24;  
 "There can be no love of God without active service." *Japuji*. (Trans.) *Ibid.* p.20.
14. "Numerous Muhammads have there been and multitudes of Brahmas  
 Vishnus, and Si vas,  
 'Thousands of Pirs and Prophets, and tens of thousands of Saints and Holy men; But the  
 Chief of Lords is the One Lord, the true name of God. O Nanak! of God, His qualities,  
 without end, beyond reckoning, who can understand Nanak," *Ratan Mala* Cunningham;  
*op.cit.*, p.330.
  15. Daljeet Singh; *Sikhism-A Comparative Study of its Theology and Mysticism* (New Delhi, 1979),  
 pp. 194-97;  
 Dhillon, G.S; *Researches in Sikh Religion and History* (Chandigarh, 1989), p.2.
  16. *Guru Granth*, p.1412.
  17. Macauliffe, M.A; *The Sikh Religion*, Vol.III, pp. 7-8.  
 The second story also concerns Guru Arjan when he deprecated the *Sakhi Sarvar* practice  
 of preparing a big cake and presenting it before the priest who read *Durud* (a verse from  
 Quran) and then kept the cake, giving only a marginal part to the devotees. The Guru says,  
 "Without the true Guru they must sit and watch without eating until the *Durud*, is read."  
 Macauliffe, Vol.III, p.419
  18. Teja Singh; *Sikhism: Its Ideals and Institutions* (Calcutta, 1964), pp.80-81.
  19. In order to emphasize the complete independence and separateness of the Sikh  
 ideology, Guru Gobind Singh introduced the *Nash* doctrine, involving *Kartnash*, *Kulnash*,  
*Bharamnash*, *Dharamnash* and *Karamnash* i.e. forsaking of all those beliefs, prejudices and  
 traditions that stood in the way of the sole worship of the Supreme Being.  
 Cunningham, J.D; *Op.cit.* p.64;  
 Bannerjee, I.B; *Evolution of the Kha/sa* Vol.II (Calcutta, 1963), p.116;  
 Daljeet Singh; *op.cit.*, 60; .  
 Dhillon, G.S; *Religion and Politics: The Sikh perspective* (Chandigarh, 1989), pp.17-18.
  20. Oberoi; *op.cit.*, p.137.
  21. *Ibid.*
  22. *Ibid.*
  23. Gupta, Hari Ram; *History of the Sikhs*, Vol.II, pp.39-45;  
 Also Vol.I, p.281.
  24. Kohli, Sita Ram; *Foreword to Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* of Sohan Lal Suri, Daftar Iv, pii.
  25. Devi Prasad, Pandit; *Gulshan-i-Punjab* (Lucknow, 1872), p.224  
 Also see Cunningham; *op.cit.*, p. 301
  26. Dhillon, G.S; *Character and Impact of The Singh Sabha Movement on the History of the Punjab* (Ph.D.  
 dissertation, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1972), pp. 28-29.
  27. Malcolm, John; *Sketch of the Sikhs* (Calcutta, 1810), pp.220.
  28. *Ibid* pp. 26-61.
  29. Dhillon, G.S; *Researches in Sikh Religion and History* (Chandigarh, 1989), p.80.

30. Oberoi, *op.cit.* p.140.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. Daljeet Singh; *op.cit.*, pp.194-197;  
Dhillon, G.S; *Religion And Politics: The Sikh Perspective* (Chandigarh, 1989), pp.1-2.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Oberoi; *op.cit.*, p. 141.
37. Mann, Jasbir Singh and Saraon, Harbans Singh; *Advanced Studies in Sikhism* (Patiala, 1989), p.28
38. Oberoi; *op.cit.*, p.142.
39. *Ibid.*, p.143.
40. *Ibid.*, p.151.
41. Dhillon, G.S. *Researches in Sikh Religion and History* (Chandigarh, 1989), p.79.
42. Oberoi; *op.cit.*, p.146
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, p. 147
45. Ganda Singh; *Kukian Di Vithiya* (Amritsar, 1946), p.36;  
Avtar Singh Vihria, also stressed the need for human Gurus and declared that Bedis, Bhallas, Trehans and Sod his deserved special reverence due to their descent from the Sikh Gurus. For details see Vihria, Avtar Singh; *Sikh Dharam Tatdarshan* (Lahore, 1894), pp.20-25, 55-60;  
Hari Singh, Bhai; *Prem Parkash* (Amritsar, n.d.) P. 2-3 Vihria, Avtar Singh; *Shok Pattar* (Lahore, 1905), p.38; *Khalsa Akhbar, Lahore*, March 26, 1897;  
Vihria, Avtar Singh; *Khalsa Sudhar Taru* (Amritsar, 1894), pp. 252-57;  
Also *Guridarshan Shastar* (Amritsar, 1916), p. 157.
46. Oberoi; *o.p.cit.*, p.147.
47. *Ibid.* p.155, 11..46.
48. Mohan Singh; *An Introduction to Punjabi Literature* (Amritsar, 1951) pp.121-42; Kohli, S.S; *Punjabi Sahit Da Itihas* (Ludhiana, 1955), p.216;  
Grewal, J.5; Prem Sutarag : *A Theory of Sikh Social Order in The Sikh Review*, September, 1989;  
RandhirSingh; *Prem Samarag Granth* (Patiala, 1953), p.9.
49. Dhillon, Balwant Singh; *Guru Amar Das And The Mughal State in the Journal of Sikh Studies*, Vol.XI, No.II, August, 1984. (Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar) p.88.
50. *Khalsa Akhbar*, Lahore, March 26, 1897, Vahiria, Avtar Singh; *Sikh Dharam Tatdarshan* (Lahore, 1894), pp.21-24, 50-60
51. "Sri Ch and, the son of Nanak, justified his father's fears, and became the founder of the Hindu sect of 'Udasis', a community indifferent to the concerns of this world".  
Cunningham, ).O., *op.cit.* p.43
52. *Ibid.* pp. 44-45;

Malcolm; *op.cit.*, p.27.

53. *Guru Granth*, pp.310 and 1102;

The author of *Dabistan*, who visited Punjab in the times of the Sixth and Seventh Gurus, says about the Sikhs, 'The Sikhs of Guru Nanak condemn idolatry and believe that all the Gurus are identical with Nanak. They do not read the Hindu Mantras, nor do they pay any regard to their shrines. They do not believe in Hindu Avatars and do not study Sanskrit, which according to Hindus is the language of the gods. The Sikhs do not have any faith in the ritual and ceremonies enjoined by the Hindu *Shastras*. A learned Hindu named Partap Mal, seeing that his son was inclined towards Islam said to him, 'There is no need for you to turn Muhammedan. If you want to get freedom in eating and drinking you may better join Sikhism.' Quoted by Teja Singh; *Sikhism; Its Ideals and Institutions* (Calcutta, 1964), pp. 80-81.

54. Bhalla, Sarup Das, *Mehma Parkash* (ed.) Lamba, Gobind Singh and Khazan Singh; Part 11 (Patiala, 1971) pp. 527- 31;  
*Gurbilas Patsahi Chevin* (Patiala, 1970), p. 511;  
 Chibber, Kesar Singh; *Bansavli Nama Dasam Patshian ka* in Parkh (ed.)  
 S.S. Kohli, *Research Bulletin of Punjabi Language And Literature* Vol.II, 1972, Panjab University, Chandigarh, pp. 70-72.

## 16

THE SIKH RULE AND RANJIT SINGH  
GURDARSHAN SINGH DHILLON

The reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh has been the subject of absorbing interest for scholars and historians but, by and large, they have concentrated their attention on the military and political achievements of the Maharaja. No doubt, he was a great military genius. His political objectives could not have been achieved without his outstanding military ability, but this is an incomplete epithet to describe him adequately. For, considering the times, the Indian background and the historical circumstances in which he appeared, the great edifice which he created and the manner in which he fostered it were, we believe, primarily due to the religious background, approach and tolerance, and the catholicity of Sikh ethos in which Ranjit Singh was born and brought up. Otherwise he would have remained a mere war-lord and an adventurer. Nurtured in the Sikh tradition and unequalled for the daring and originality of his many-sided genius, the Maharaja gave the Punjab four decades of peace, prosperity and progress, the benefits of which were enjoyed equally by all the communities. This paper is an endeavour to study the salient features of the Khalsa Raj under Ranjit Singh and to evaluate his place in the history of this region.

The character and the nature of his polity is a subject of controversy among scholars. Many writers like J.D. Cunningham<sup>1</sup> and Sita Ram Kohli<sup>2</sup> ascribe to Ranjit Singh high and noble objectives on the basis of which he carved out his kingdom, which became the source of power and pride for the Sikhs. Many others like Prinsep<sup>3</sup> and N.K. Sinha<sup>4</sup> have characterised his polity as absolute despotism, which was the just outcome of his military enterprise.

Kingdoms and empires have almost invariably been founded and maintained on the strength of arms. Ranjit Singh had as good a right to carve out a kingdom for himself and his people through

the exercise of arms as any other ruler before or after him. In the ultimate analysis, the fundamental criterion to measure a ruler's greatness should be the manner in which he wields his authority. To what end does he use his power, for the furtherance of his own personal ambitions or for the welfare of his subjects through the projection of eternal values of truth, goodness, justice and freedom? This is the fundamental criterion which we shall use and which we feel should be the only criterion for any kind of modern historiography. In short, our test should be not how an Ashoka or a Changez Khan gets his power but how he uses it and the net results which he achieves.

Both Carlyle<sup>5</sup> and Macaulay<sup>6</sup> lodged their protest against history being made a mere record of 'court and camp', of royal intrigue and state rivalry, of pageants or processions or chivalric encounters. According to Carlyle the essence of history does not lie in laws, Senate houses or battle-fields but in the tide of thought and action- the world of existence that brightens, glooms, blossoms and fades. What gives meaning to history is not merely the exploits and aggressive enterprises of the conquerors and kings, but how the victorious sword is used during the times of peace. A ruler's greatness lies in the vision he projects for the future, the message he leaves for posterity, the direction and dimension that he imparts to history. What mankind needs is peace, progress, prosperity and a harmonious social order. A ruler can best be judged in terms of Arnold Toynbee's well known historical formula of 'Challenge and response'<sup>7</sup>. The correct measure of a ruler is the vision - in terms of initiative, depth and sincerity- that he has in responding to the need of times i.e. whether he is an Ashoka or a Changez Khan, a Lenin or a Stalin.

In view of the above criterion we shall explain in this study how Ranjit Singh employed his power and how other rulers of his times, great or small, directed that power to different ends. For this purpose we shall also indicate very briefly the ideological background which threw him up, shaped his character and governed his perceptions and personality. According to Lepel Griffin, "Ranjit Singh was so completely a product of the Sikh theocracy and so embodied the spirit of the Khalsa, that no account of his character and. career would be complete without a description of the religious system of the Sikhs."<sup>8</sup>

*Ideological Background:* Sikhism arose in the sixteenth century as a new revolutionary ideology opposed in its fundamentals to

the contemporary and earlier religions. It challenged on the one hand the fanaticism and religious hypocrisy of the priestly class<sup>9</sup> and on the other hand the religio-political oppression of the contemporary rulers.<sup>10</sup> Guru Nanak's rejection of the Varna Ashrama Dharma and of the cult of gods and goddesses<sup>11</sup> 'and his emphasis on the unity of mankind<sup>12</sup> and oneness *or* God<sup>13</sup> constituted a daring and a glaring departure from orthodox Hinduism. He challenged the conventional yardsticks of religion and society of his times by denouncing asceticism,<sup>14</sup> idolatry<sup>15</sup> ceremonialism and the role of the intermediary agency between God and man.<sup>16</sup> He exhorted people not to shun the battle of life, not to renounce their hearths and homes, not to retreat to the private solitude of the hills and caves but to live the life of full blooded householders. He introduced a conspicuous note of world and life-affirmation in his teachings by bridging the gulf between the spiritual and the empirical realms of human existence.<sup>17</sup> The significance of the Guru's message lies in emphasising the role of religion as an instrument of liberation, personal as well as social. In the integrated vision of the Guru, religion became a potential basis of freedom for man - freedom from tyranny, freedom from injustice and freedom from ruthless religious conversion. The Guru thus laid the foundations of a Catholic or liberal religion, which was not a mere system of philosophy or a set of abstract ideas, concerning God and the mystery of life and death. It was a discipline, a way of life which infused spiritual and social vitality in its followers and brought about a far-reaching transformation in their outlook. The Gurus believed that religion could be an effective vehicle of promoting the values of social harmony, love, equality, freedom and brotherhood of man. They aimed at a social revolution that would lead to the emergence of an egalitarian, forward-looking and just social order.<sup>18</sup>

Sikh movement was not only an egalitarian social order; it was a plebian political revolution as well; but the pressure of circumstances prevented it from assuming spectacular dimensions. Nevertheless, the rise of the Khalsa, the martyrdom of the Gurus, the saga of Sikh resistance to the Mughals and Afghan Invaders carried a new message of hope and kindled that spark in human nature that impelled men to seek out a better and saner path for mankind. People looked with eager eyes to the rise of a messiah who would finally deliver them from socio-political persecution of the contemporary rulers and tyranny and oppression of the

invaders.

The first bid for establishing the Khalsa Raj was made by Banda Singh Bahadur but he did not last long. Banda had an indomitable spirit but, faced with the over-whelming might of the Mughal empire, he could not succeed in liberating the country from the oppressive rule. He and his 740 followers were tortured to death.<sup>19</sup> However, Banda deserves credit for laying down the foundations of the political sovereignty of the Sikhs. On the Diwali day of October 27, 1761, the Sikhs assembled at Amritsar and passed a national resolution, called the *Gurmatta*, to liberate Punjab from the foreign invaders and seize all their strongholds.<sup>20</sup>

The Sikh Misl, which emerged on the scene, no doubt, had a great political potential but through their internecine quarrels, they had reduced each other to a state of political dream of Khalsa Raj. George Forster, a traveller who was a keen observer of things remarked; "We may see some ambitious chief led on by his genius and success and absorbing the power of his associates display from the ruins of their commonwealth the standard of monarchy".<sup>21</sup>

Ranjit Singh was a characteristic product of the Sikh tradition and was also the leader, who had come to deliver the goods. Thus the emergence of Khalsa Raj under him was neither an accident nor a freak of history. It was a unique historical phenomenon, the outcome and the flowering of a prolonged struggle for capturing political power and must be understood in its true perspective. Bir Singh, a contemporary of Ranjit Singh in his poetical composition, *Bara Maha Guru Gobind Singh Ji Ka*, refers to the period of socio-political turmoil gone through by the peasant-soldiers or the *Singhs*, who had become Sardars (rulers) with the Guru's grace.<sup>22</sup>

*Ranjit Singh's Career:* Ranjit Singh became the chief of the Sukerchakia Misl at the age of eleven years in 1791. In his young days, he was an excellent soldier and the beau-ideal of youth. One of his ancestors Budh Singh had been one of the Khalsas baptized by Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>23</sup> He found the Punjab strife-ridden and chaotic, a loose confederacy of powerful Misl Chiefs, lacking the corporate spirit and indulging in petty intrigues and dissensions. In the absence of a strong central authority, the state had become a prey to the Afghan invaders on the one hand and to the Marattha and the British designs on the other. Ranjit Singh brought the Misl chiefs into submission, fired his people with a corporate zeal and led them from victory to victory so as to galvanise a whole people with a sense of collective triumph. 'He avenged the innumerable



defeats, humiliations and depredations suffered by India over the centuries at the hands of the Afghan invaders by conquering part of the Indian territory wrested by them and more than that, by being an arbiter in the fate of Afghanistan herself.<sup>24</sup> He rose to be the ruler of a powerful state extending from Tibet to Sind and from Khyber pass to the Satluj. With his capture of Lahore he sealed the Khyber pass for ever, thus putting an end to the tyranny and oppression of the invaders. He was both feared and respected by the British, who ruled over the rest of the sub-continent. It has been acknowledged that in fulfilling his ambitions, Ranjit Singh used the barest minimum of force necessary. Baron Charles Hugel records, "Never perhaps was so large an empire founded by one man with so little criminality; and when we consider the country and the uncivilised people with whom he had to deal, his mild and prudent Government must be regarded with feelings of astonishment."<sup>25</sup> Similarly Captain Murray says, "It is difficult to suppress admiration in contemplating the career of such a man, who, with so many disadvantages, succeeded, with so few crimes in elevating himself from a simple Sardar to be the sovereign of a large kingdom, including Hindus and Mohammadans, as well as the Sikhs, the only state in India, not substantially under British dominion."<sup>26</sup> Even Henry T. Prinsep, who is a critic of Ranjit Singh, acknowledges that the Maharaja's career was "stained by no bloody executions and by much fewer crimes."<sup>27</sup>

*The Sikh Raj*: In Sikhism the inward and the outward, the spiritual and the empirical are inextricably interwoven.<sup>28</sup> The Gurus believed that a combination of religion and politics was essential to achieve the ethical ideals of human equality, freedom and justice. There was something positive and constructive in this combination which could abolish some of the worst evils of society and open new vistas of peace, progress and harmony. A sound social order could be built and preserved only through moral and ethical imperatives and by abiding values of tolerance, humility, charity and compassion that constitute Dharma.

Ranjit Singh built his rule on religious foundations. He referred to his Government as Sarkar-i-Khalsa, which derived its legitimacy from the Khalsa or the Commonwealth - the mystic entity in which resided all sovereign powers pertaining to the Sikh community. He referred to his Darbar as Darbar-i-Khalsa. He never arrogated to himself the title or powers of a despot. He attributed every success to the favour of God and he styled himself

and the people collectively as the Khalsa or Commonwealth of Gobind. Everything was meant for the benefit of his subjects, including the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims because the Khalsa aims at '*Sarbat da Bhala*' (welfare of entire humanity). His state salutation was *Wahe-i-Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wahe-i-Guru Ji Ki Fateh* (Khalsa belongs to God and its victory is the victory of God). He was often heard saying that he was nothing more than a mere *Nagara* (drum) of Guru Gobind Singh. He would say that while the literal meaning of Ranjit - the meaning which his father had apparently intended while choosing his name in preference to his original name, 'Budh Singh' - was victorious, its real significance to his mind lay in that it had been the name of one of the drums of Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>29</sup> Both the Guru's drum and he himself announced the victory of the Khalsa, but were in themselves nothing but instruments. On every Vaisakhi, he would go to Amritsar and make his salutations at the haloed centre, where the Gurus had inspired their followers and had laid the foundations of the Sikh society.

His official seal bore the words - *Akal Sahai* (May God help). The term also indicated that the Khalsa did not owe its allegiance to any earthly power, and that he acted in total devotion to *Akal* (The Timeless Reality). Similarly, the coin of Ranjit Singh does not mention any particular person or king, except Guru Nanak as the true Emperor of both the worlds, spiritual and empirical. His coinage which was called *Nanak Shahi* bore the inscription, "Hospitality, the sword, victory and conquest unailing from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh." He never struck any coin in his own name. He listened daily to the readings from the Guru Granth. On one occasion when the Akal Takhat took exception to a moral lapse on the part of the Maharaja, he humbly surrendered to the dictates of the Supreme Sikh Authority, the Akal Takhat, and readily bared his back for receiving public flogging as chastisement for his un-Sikh like failing.

Born and brought up in the Sikh faith, Ranjit Singh was fully conversant with the catholicity of the Sikh tradition, which left its visible impact on his outlook and policy. Religious bigotry, he knew was incompatible with Sikhism. The ideas of unity of God, universal brotherhood and welfare of all (*Sarbat Da Bhala*) which summed up the basic tenets of Sikhism, enabled him to restore complete religious harmony in his kingdom. Here it will be worthwhile to compare him with the great Maratha ruler Shivaji, who had directed his power to the defence of Brahmins, cow and

caste and was known by the title of *Gou Brahman Pritpalika* (Defender of Orthodox Hindu faith).<sup>30</sup> All his ministers, except the Commander-in-Chief, belonged to the Brahmin caste. His reign marked the triumphant establishment of an aggressive Hindu Swarajya (militant political expression of orthodox Hinduism).<sup>31</sup>

Ranjit Singh did not proclaim Sikhism to be the state religion nor did he make any conscious efforts to propagate his religion. His catholicity of religious outlook was reflected in his according due respect to all religions. This was fully in consonance with the principle of universal love and equality propounded by the Sikh Gurus. Sikhism did not have an ordained priestly class that could rule in the name of Sikh religion. But the religio-political views of the Gurus could be inferred from the *Gurbani* and the lives and deeds of the Gurus. In the vision of the Sikh Gurus, a sane human society was essentially a plural one in which each community was afforded the opportunity to work out its genius to the fullest possibilities and potentialities. The Sikh Gurus who suffered martyrdoms to uphold the religious liberties of the people, laid repeated emphasis on the unity of mankind in their *Bani*. Ranjit Singh held fast to the values of justice, freedom and human dignity, not through any defined statements or religious vows or policy pronouncements but through stark deeds. There is no denying the fact that it was because of his Sikh religious background that he proved to be a more enlightened exponent of humanitarianism and tolerance than his contemporary emperors and kings or even some of the so-called modern secular or democratic rulers.

The spirit of forbearance and moderation displayed by Ranjit Singh was in sharp contrast with the inhuman practices of the Mughal rulers, their plunder, greed, devastations and forced conversions. The Muslim state in India, being entirely subordinate to the Church, had believed in waging a religious war (*Jehad*) against the infidels. It aimed at stamping out all forms of pluralism whether political, religious or social and demanded total conformism in faith, belief, form and action. The ideal of the Muslim state was the conversion of the entire population to Islam and the extinction of every form of dissent. Accordingly non-Muslims were not looked upon as equal citizens of the State. In order to secure the right of exercising their religion, they had to suffer political and social disabilities and pay toll tax (*Jazia*). Under Aurangzeb there was large scale destruction of non-Muslim religious temples and other religious institutions in northern India.

The Muslim rule in Europe was, without doubt, liberal compared to the contemporary Christian states but its limitation was that it had to abide by the strict rules of the *Shariat* which was sometimes interpreted arbitrarily by bigoted Mullas resulting in serious socio-political discrimination. Of course the imposition of *Jaziya* on non-Muslims was an accepted principle under the *Shariat*. The crusade or Jihad against the non-believers or non-Muslim states with a view to spreading Islam was also an accepted principle of Islamic polity.

In the pre-Muslim India, the four fold division of Hindu society was looked upon as divinely ordained. Manu desired that a king should zealously guard and uphold this caste-based division. As a result, Brahmins came to enjoy a special status and laid claim to various immunities from the workings of the common law, even in matters of taxation and justice. In addition to those immunities, they enjoyed the right to collect from the masses a regular tax called Brahman A vimasti, the only logic behind it being their claim to divine favour as a reward for their good deeds done in their past lives.<sup>32,32</sup> Macrindle, J.W.; Ancient India As Described by Magathenes and Arian

Evidently, there was no equality before law. The state, too, became a party to the various discriminations made against the lower castes in the name of a divinely ordained caste system.<sup>33</sup> Not only the perpetuation of acute and serious caste discrimination against the *Shudras* and lower castes and maintenance of the supremacy of Brahmins as the sole interpreters of *Dharma*, was the primary duty of a Hindu King, but the manner in which the Buddhists were treated, involving their virtual elimination from the Indian sub-continent is a part of history.<sup>34</sup> It is very relevant to point out that in contemporary Europe of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Jewish ghetto, like discrimination against the untouchables, was an established institution. In the times just preceding the Muslim invasion of India, the Hindu orthodoxy was seen launching a religious crusade against the Buddhists. The holy Boddhi tree at Gaya was burnt.<sup>35</sup> A Hindu temple was erected on the ruins of a Buddhist monastery. A large scale massacre of Buddhists was ordered. Such a policy resulted in the alienation of the Buddhists from the Hindus and eventually led to their virtual disappearance from India.<sup>36</sup>

As against what we have stated about the Muslim rulers and Hindu kings, the most striking feature of the policy of Ranjit Singh was the equal respect shown to all faiths. He did not treat the Sikhs

as a privileged class and did not place any disabilities on his non-Sikh subjects. Nor did he interfere with the religious and cultural life, of other communities. They were allowed freely to practise their religions without payment of any special tax. There were no discriminating tariffs. His policy was free from bigotry or any kind of narrowness of outlook and racial arrogance, inherent in the traditional Hindu system of caste. His contemporary rulers, the Peshawas could not be entirely free from the shackles of casteism and Brahminical chauvinism. Between caste and caste they could not always maintain the balance evenly.<sup>37</sup>

Ranjit Singh gave complete freedom of expression and worship to all his subjects. Under him careers were thrown open to men of talent, irrespective of their religion, caste or class. Even when he bestowed his favours, he endeavoured to maintain an even balance among Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Far from demolishing the religious places of Muslims or Hindus, he was in fact generous in his endowments to the Hindus and the Muslim places of worship. He gave liberal grants to the Muslim places of worship. He gave liberal grants to the learned Muslims and paid due respect to the *fakirs* and *derveshs* of his kingdom. He repaired the *Muslim monuments*. The Sunehri Masjid in Kashmiri Bazar of Lahore, which had been earlier in the possession of the non-Muslims was restored to the Muslims and the tombs of Hazrat Data Ganja and Monj-i-Darya were repaired at the state expense. A Muslim calligraphist, who had transcribed the *Quran* in an exquisite hand and did not find a buyer to pay the price of his life long labour and was ready to leave for Hyderabad to sell the Quran to the Nizam, was paid Rupees one lac by the Maharaja. He got the holy books of the Muslims and the Hindus translated into other languages. He participated in the festivals of Id, Holi, Dusshehra, Baisakhi and Basant with the same enthusiasm as others. His Hindu, Muslim and Sikh subjects reciprocated these gestures by praying for him on important occasions - when he launched a new campaign, when he won a new victory, when he had a hair-breadth escape, when he was ill, or when he recovered from illness.

The minority status of the Sikh ruler was no handicap in commanding allegiance from his Muslim and Hindu subjects. Surjit Hans's argument that the Maharaja on account of his minority status perforce had to strengthen his bonds with the Hindus and pacify the Muslims,<sup>38</sup> is untenable. Invaders who came, too often, always imposed their minority rule through sheer

force. In the background that the Sikhs had suffered immensely and immediately before the Sikh rule, and the community had gone through one of the worst persecutions at the hands of the Muslim rulers, it is extremely creditable for the Maharaja not only to give equal treatment to his Muslim subjects but also fully to trust his Muslim employees manning the highest posts in his administration. In the medieval period, monarchs were not dependent on the votes of their subjects and the question of majority or minority was hardly relevant. For the Muslim rulers, when they chose, could be cruelly intolerant and oppressive towards the majority of their subjects. In this context it is idle to indicate that Ranjit Singh's policies towards the Muslims were related to any consideration of pacification, of the majority community who were mostly converts and were only marginally a majority.<sup>39</sup> Besides, fake postures towards the Muslims could never beget their trust in a manner and to the extent the policy of Ranjit Singh begot. The revolts of Muslim generals during the Muslim history in India have been a common feature. It, therefore, speaks volumes for the humanity of Ranjit Singh that none of his Muslim Generals or fallen foes revolted, in fact, they loyally fought for the Sikh kingdom to the last. In this context, the observation of Surjit Hans looks so meaningless and puerile. Ranjit Singh solved the problem of multiple faiths by a policy of large-hearted liberalism. This liberalism, it may be reiterated, had its roots in the Sikh faith itself. As a matter of fact, Ranjit Singh's faith and Sikh ethos guided him inevitably along this path.

During his reign, there were no outbursts of communal fanaticism, no forced conversions, no attempts at bloody revenge, no language tensions, no second class citizens, no repression, no bloodsheds, no executions and no tortures. Punishments were humane. There was no capital punishment which even the modern governments have not been able to abolish. It was not awarded even when there was an attempt on the life of the Maharaja himself. Such a thing is unknown in monarchical history, much less in the rule of a despot. It is therefore both incorrect and unfair to call his rule autocratic, despotic, or personalised when it is seen that in modern India Mahatma Gandhi's assassin was hanged. W.G. Osborne says that, "except in actual open warfare he has never been known to take life, though his own has been attempted more than once, and his reign will be found freer from any striking acts of cruelty and oppression than those of many more civilized

monarchs.”<sup>40</sup> It is to his credit that during his reign of forty years he did not sentence even one person to death. He bore no rancour against his Muslim predecessors who were responsible for the persecution of the Sikh Gurus and had unleashed a reign of terror on the Sikh community.

Ranjit Singh's employment policy reflected the basic liberal and humanitarian teaching of Sikhism. The highest posts in his Government were as open to Muslims as to the Sikhs and the Hindus. Fakir Aziz-ud-Din was his most trusted minister. Fakir-ud-Din was the Governor of Lahore and was one of the closest confidants of the Maharaja. There were many Muslims occupying high positions as Governors of provinces and forts, and commanders of the armies.<sup>41</sup> Muslims on their part proved worthy of the trust. Poet Shah Muhamad shed tears over the fall of the Sikh kingdom. Similarly, the Maharaja bore no malice towards the Hindus. He overlooked so many past instances of Hindu betrayal to the Sikhs, whether it be that of Chandu Shah, who had played a role in the persecution of Guru Arjan<sup>42</sup> or Hill Rajput Rajas, who had invited the imperial forces to suppress Guru Gobind Singh and his followers.<sup>43</sup> or the role of Gangu in betraying the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh and passing them on to the custody of the ruler of Sirhind, execution of whom later invited the wrath of Banda involving the silck of Sirhind. The other instances of Hindu treachery were that of Diwan Lakhpat Rai, who along with Yahiyya Khan, was instrumental in the destruction of the Darbar Sahib<sup>44</sup> and Kabli Mal, who in his capacity as Governor of Lahore had defiled the sanctity of the sacred tank of Darbar Sahib on the instructions of Ahmed Shah Abdali.<sup>45</sup> The Sikhs had resented the hostility of the Pathans and the Mughals and the treason of the Hindus, who often became the willing partners of Imperial forces and invaders in suppressing and oppressing the Sikhs. Ranjit Singh forgot all this and entrusted talented Hindus with the highest responsibilities of the State. Misr Beli Ram was the Revenue minister of the State, while Diwan Bhawani Das, Diwan Ganga Ram and Diwan Dina Nath were respectively Pay Master General, Accountant General and Comptroller General of the Lahore Darbar. Hill Dogras Dhian Singh, Khushal Singh and Gulab Singh were appointed to the positions of supreme authority in the Civil apparatus of the Maharaja's government. Brahmins like Teja Singh and Lal Singh were granted such influence, as eventually raise

them to the supreme command of the Sikh army. Diwan Mokham Chand was made the commander of the Khalsa army. In fact, historians have strongly criticised Ranjit Singh's over indulgence towards or misplaced trust in the Hill Dogras or the Purbia Generals, who in crisis betrayed the Sikhs and became the principal cause of the fall of the Sikh kingdom.<sup>46</sup>

*Treatment to Fallen Enemies:* In dealing with his fallen enemies, Ranjit Singh displayed unexampled generosity. Not only the Sikh nobles and Sardars but also the deposed Muslim and Hindu nobles were provided with Jagirs and treated equally and generously. In fact, Maharaja's treatment of the fallen Muslim foes was unprecedented. The defeated Afghan Governor Sultan Muhammad Khan was given a Jagir of Rupees three lacs as revenues of the areas comprising Kohat and Hashat Nagar. When he conquered Kasur from Nawab Kutub-ud-Din, he gave him the jagir of Mamdot which brought a revenue of 190,000 rupees a year. In the same way, when he conquered Multan he granted a big jagir in Sharkpur and Naulakhe to the Nawab's sons.<sup>47</sup> He honoured the sentiments of his Muslim subjects and maintained the established Muslim tradition of State-grants to Ulemas and holymen. There is an important entry in the Diary - News of Ranjit Singh's court-25th August, 1825, "The Kazis, Sayads, Alamas and Fakirs of Peshawar were given good *khilats* and each was given a *jagir* for his maintenance when the Maharaja annexed Peshawar."<sup>48</sup> When the victory procession of the Maharaja passed through the streets of Peshawar, he issued strict instructions to his Sardars to observe ethical restraint in keeping with the Sikh tradition, not to damage any mosque, not to insult any woman and not to destroy any crops. The Muslim priests were so pleased that they blessed the victor.<sup>49</sup> No wonder the Muslim Generals of the Maharaja were responsible for carrying his flag across the Punjab borders. In this connection observations made by Sir Henry Lawrence are noteworthy; "Members of the deposed ruling families may be seen in Delhi and Kabul in a state of penury, but in the Punjab there is not to be seen a single ruling family whose territories may have been conquered by Ranjit Singh, and which may have been left unprovided by him. Not only the Sikh ruling houses, but those of other faiths, too, were provided for by him with equal munificence."<sup>50</sup> A similar observation is made by Lepel Griffin: "With all his rapacity Ranjit Singh was not cruel or blood-thirsty. After the victory or the capture of a fortress he treated the vanquished with leniency and



kindness, however stout their resistance might have been, and there were at his court many chiefs despoiled of their estates but to whom he had given suitable employ.”<sup>51</sup>

Here it will not be out of place to compare Ranjit Singh with the Marathas who had allowed the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II to languish in his palace with a niggardly allowance. By propping up the Imperial edifice the Marathas had derived considerable advantage but it was rather sad that they did not mitigate the King's pecuniary distress. This sordid policy had not only disgusted the royal house of Timur but had also roused the indignation of many Muhammadans in the country who did not approve of the treatment meted out to the Imperial family. It was, therefore, not surprising that in September, 1803, the hapless Mughal emperor welcomed the English as deliverers.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, the treatment meted out by Governor-General Dalhousie to the royal house of Sikhs reflected no credit on the British. The minor Maharaja Dalip Singh was converted to Christianity, given a meagre pension of 13,000 per annum and after separating him from his mother, was sent to England. Maharani Jindan, called the 'mother of Khalsa' was also treated very shabbily and was forced to leave the country. In pursuance of his imperial policies, Dalhousie abolished all military grants to the Sikh Sardars. Henry Lawrence, as head of the Board of Control, responsible for the administration of Punjab, recommended slight leniency towards the Sikh nobility. But Dalhousie insisted that Jagirdars deserved "little but maintenance".<sup>53</sup> Henry Lawrence tendered his resignation over this issue.

Among the notable traits of Ranjit Singh's character were his kindness and the total absence of malice, cruelty or vindictiveness. These being so uncommon in the context of his times, were evidently due to the Sikh tradition and ethos in which he had been nurtured, conditioned and motivated. His regime was not stained by such dark blots as was the Mughal rule. For, there are numerous instances like the cruel death of Dara Shikoh at the hands of his own brother, or the diabolical murders of twenty one captains of Ali Wardi Khan, or the degradation and blinding of Emperor Shah Alam II. .

The Marathas knew how to conquer but not how to govern. Though they were the strong exponents of Hindu Swarajya, yet 'outside the Swarajya they plundered Hindus as ruthlessly as Muslims so that their claim to be serving the cause of Hinduism

was falsified.<sup>54</sup> Here it will be worthwhile to give another historical analogy of the British Governors Clive and Warren Hastings, both of whom had to face disgrace and degradation on account of their involvement in charges of corruption, bribery and extortion.<sup>55</sup> Both of them were impeached. Clive who is regarded as the founder of the British empire in India committed suicide in disgrace and frustration.

Similarly, Alfonso Albuquerque, the founder of the Portuguese Empire in India tried to establish Christianity in his territory with sword and fire.<sup>56</sup> In its religious zeal the Portuguese power became ruthless and issued charters from time to time making invidious distinctions between Christians and non-Christians and subjecting the latter to untold disabilities. An enactment was passed debarring all non-Christians from holding any public office. In pursuance of another enactment, the property of non-Christian orphans was confiscated, if they refused to be converted to Christianity. Under pain of being proceeded against by the law of the land, the people of Goa were prohibited from using their native language Konkani and were forced to learn the Portuguese language within a period of three years. The aim of all these enactments was to compel the natives either to accept Christian religion or to leave the state.<sup>57</sup>

To describe Ranjit Singh's rule as military despotism is to do a great injustice to him. A comparative study of the contemporary Governments in the west reveals that Ranjit Singh's rule was more humane and popular than all of them. His contemporary rulers in the West were known for their highly centralised and despotic rule, whether it was that of autocratic Napoleon Bonaparte (1804-15), or of the inglorious LouisXVIII (1814-24), or of the vindictive Bourbon Charles X (1824-30) or of the self-centred Louis Phillippe (1830-48) in France, or of Geroge III, IV and William IV in England, or, for that matter, of the tyrant Czar Nicholas I (1826-55) in Russia. Let us amplify the point in respect of Napoleon. The French Revolution was the flower of the centuries following Reformation and Renaissance. And yet, Napoleon buried that flower before it could fructify into a tangible fruit. It is not in doubt that he virtually destroyed the ideas and ethos of the Revolution that produced him. But the point for study is whether the ideas that led to the Revolution and which were easily smothered and distorted by Napoleon, an upstart, were really so great. Factually, Reformation in one sense belittled the Christian ethos and its supremacy over

the political life came to an end. The states came to be governed by the whims of the rulers, political elites or classes. Ultimately it revived, as Toynbee laments, the parochial Greek idea of the national state being the goddess, thereby involving the gradual erosion of Christian ethos even in the social life. Rational concept and dry ideas have no meaning unless they influence human and social behaviour. To us it appears a contradiction to say that the French Revolution was a great event of history, even though it was destroyed in the country of its birth within half a dozen years. As against it, Sikhism was a movement that changed the life and motivations of a people, with the result that even an unlettered person, when he came to power, created a socio-political administration that was remarkably humane and just, even though, he belonged to a community that was in a microscopic minority. Ranjit Singh's conquests were not to bring glorification to his person, community or people but to give peace to Punjab by stopping once for all a thousand year wave of invaders that had subjected Punjabis to perpetual loot, massacres, butchery, and disgrace. As stated above, Ranjit Singh won the hearts of his people, including Muslims and Hindus by giving them peace, security and justice and not by any sense of glorification or threat of terror. What we mean to stress is that religious thought and ethos that permeate and affect the moral life, behavior and sentiments of a people are far more enduring and meaningful than rational concepts that generally remain ethereal and short-lived, and fail to influence human motivations. So to us the inference is obvious enough that in comparison it is not that Napoleon was a villain and Ranjit Singh a saint but that the ideology that produced Ranjit Singh was far superior to the ideas and thinking that preceded Napoleon and the French Revolution.

Ranjit Singh's rule was, on the whole, humanitarian and humane. In fact his clear attempt at self-effacement and avoidance of any personal elevation, while giving credit to God, Guru and the Khalsa, would suggest a kind of rule, beneficial, free from wanton atrocities and solicitous of the public weal.<sup>58</sup> In its contemporary world it is the most inspiring example of a just state. That rule is, thus, full of lessons even for present day politics. Captain Murray pays the most befitting tribute to the Maharaja in these words, "Ranjit Singh has been likened to Mehmet Ali and to Napoleon..... There are some points in which he resembles both; but estimating his character with reference to his circumstances and positions, he

is perhaps a more remarkable man than either. There was no ferocity in his disposition and he never punished a criminal with death even under circumstances of aggravated offence. Humanity indeed, or rather tenderness for life, was a trait in the character of Ranjit Singh. There is no instance of his having wantonly imbued his hands in blood.”<sup>59</sup>

The habitual meekness of spirit which the Maharaja displayed even at the peak of his glory, the sympathy which he showed to the fallen foes and the compassion he had for animals demonstrated the breadth of his vision and the catholicity of his temper. It was quite in keeping with Sikh tradition and the Scriptural injunction, “To exercise forbearance in the midst of power, to be humble in the midst of honour.”<sup>60</sup> C.L. Chopra believes that considering the social and political conditions of the country over which he ruled, the government of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was “surprisingly mild and merciful.”<sup>61</sup> On one occasion he is said to have punished one of his generals for killing a *Koel* (nightingale) when she was warbling. No body was allowed to hurt a swan, a parrot or a sparrow. Cow slaughter was banned throughout the Empire in deference to the wishes of his Hindu subjects.

*Sikh Administration:* A distinguishing feature of the Khalsa Raj was an orderly system of administration based upon territorial divisions like that of *Subas, parganas, tapas* and *mauzas* (Village). The administrative hierarchy of the *Nazim*, the *Kardar*, the *Chaudhary* and the *Muqaddam*, linked the far flung villages of the Sikh empire to the capital city of Lahore.<sup>62</sup> Thus, Ranjit Singh exercised his authority on the basis of the willing cooperation of indigenous socio-political institutions. He made no innovations in the Civil administration of his dominions but tried to improve the old arrangements. The stability of Ranjit Singh’s regime also rested upon moderation in what the state expropriated from the peasantry as its share of the agricultural produce. According to one source, the government’s share varied between two - fifth to one-third of the gross produce.<sup>63</sup> An agricultural tax of this order was in keeping with what the state could legitimately demand from the peasantry. The revenue could be paid in cash or kind and in easy instalments. A notable achievement of the Maharaja was that the ownership of the land was vested in the cultivator,<sup>64</sup> from whom the revenue was collected directly without the intervention of the middleman, an institution he summarily dispensed with. During the course of war or the movement of troops, any damage

to the standing crops was severely dealt with. The soldiers had to dismount from their horses while passing through the villages and the pathways leading to the corn fields. Punjab peasantry, suppressed for centuries, was put on the road to prosperity and given a new dispensation.

The administration of justice under Ranjit Singh was, by the standards of times, simple, well-organised and suited to the needs of the people. In villages, the disputes were settled by the arbitration of Panchayats, who had to decide cases according to the custom prevailing in each locality. In the towns the function was entrusted to the *Kardars*, *Nazims* or sometimes to officials called *Adalties* (judges). An *Adalt-i-Ala* or High Court was set up at the capital. Above them all was the Maharaja himself to hear appeals and petitions made against the decisions of the above mentioned authorities. He was in the habit of receiving petitions and listening to complaints even during the course of passing through the streets. Decisions were speedy and justice was quick. With the Maharaja justice was a passion. He believed that the only divine element in kingship was justice. He sent instructions to the *Chief Kotwal* of Lahore that he should not spare the Maharaja himself or any member of his family, should they be found guilty of any offence. It was a unique instance where the king had accepted equality with his subjects. A protector of the poor and the weak, the Maharaja established a state where the strong were just and the weak secure.

Though cruelty, killings, injustice and oppression practiced and the wars fought in the current century have raised a serious question mark in the minds of many thinking persons about the form of government best suited for a people, many persons conditioned by the western education are still sold to the idea of a democratic structure of government being the best to secure justice among the people. On the other hand, the concept of kingship at once raises the idea of despotic and unjust rule. It is, perhaps, in this context that Fakir Syed Waheduddin has quoted two orders of Ranjit Singh to ensure justice among the people and the application of secular laws of each community to its members through courts presided over by persons of the community concerned. These orders emphasize two things. First, that equality before the law and equity in administration were the fundamental criteria of Ranjit Singh's administration. Second, that because of the actual humane manner in which justice was administered, it was never felt

necessary by him to give the extreme punishment of death so as to secure respect for the law. And, in this respect, he ensured the sanctity of this principle by not punishing with death even those who had attempted to kill him. We give below the two orders issued by Ranjit Singh.

I. "Sincere Well-wisher, Fakir Nuruddin Ji, May you be happy.

It is hereby decreed by His Highness with the utmost emphasis that no person in the city should practice high-handedness and oppression on the people. Indeed, if even His Highness himself should issue an inappropriate order against any resident of Lahore, it should be clearly brought to the notice of His Highness so that it may be amended. Protector of Bravery. Malwa Singh should always be advised to dispense justice in accordance with legitimate right and without the slightest oppression and, furthermore, he should be advised to pass orders in consultation with the Panches and Judges of the city and in accordance with the Shastras and the Quran, as pertinent to the faith of the parties; for such is our pleasure. And should any person fail to act in accordance with your advice or instructions, you should send him a formal letter so that it may serve as a proof on the strength of which His Highness may punish him for disobedience.

Despatched from the Court of  
His Highness

For repairs to the old ditch an  
expenditure of two thousand  
rupees is hereby sanctioned.

31 Bhadon, 1882 Sambat

For the present the salary of Fakir Sahib, Rs.1500/- . After expenditure on the said ditch, the salary of Sher Dyal, Rs.500/-" <sup>65</sup>

II. "Ujjal Didar Nirmal Budh Sardar Amir Singh Ji and our sincere well-wisher, Fakir Nuruddin Ji, May you live long by the grace of Sri Akal Purakhand enjoy the protection of Sri Akal Budh.

By the grace of Sri Sat Guruji, the exalted command is issued to you that, deeming yourselves to be responsible for the security of Lahore, you should take care of the duties pertaining thereto. Sri Sat Guruji forbid, if His Highness, his beloved son Kharak Singh Ji, Kanwar Sher Singh Ji, the Raja Kalan Bahadur, Raja Such et Singh Ji, or Jamadar Ji should commit any inappropriate act, you should bring it to the notice of His Highness. Secondly, you should send your trusted representative to the Sardars with instructions to refrain from committing inappropriate acts. If the Sardars act according to your instructions, well and good; otherwise you

should send word to them that you will bring the matter to the notice of His Highness. Moreover, you should not permit forcible possession to be taken of any person's land or any person's house to be demolished. Nor should you allow any high-handedness to be practised upon woodcutters, fodder-vendors, oil-vendors, horse-shoers, factory owners, etc. In such cases also you should prevent the oppressor from oppression. You should administer matters in the same way as Sardar Desa Singh Ji, should not permit anybody to be treated harshly and should forward to the Highness any petitions intended for him. Furthermore, you should daily send for Chand Mall, Kotwal of the Royal Court. and Babu Panda, and obtain from them news of all happenings so that every person's rights are secured and no person is oppressed. The frames of the city gates should be caused to be repaired from the revenue of the Court. Hazara Sawars should be appointed to watch the roads and, considering the security of the whole of Lahore city as your responsibility, you should act in accordance with this decree. Dated Lahore, 19 Pos, 1888 Sambat".<sup>66</sup> I

Waheeduddin concludes that these orders are "unique in one respect: they throw overboard the time-honoured legal fiction upon which the fact of kingship is based- that the king can do no wrong. It was characteristic of Ranjit Singh to acknowledge that, both as a man and as a king, he was fallible and to provide against any possible adverse effects of his fallibility upon the rights and well-being of his people."<sup>67</sup>

Students of history are well aware of the presence of racial, religious and ethnic discrimination and even riots in modern states, as also of the need or use of drastic force to maintain law and order. In this context, three things are important and speak for themselves. First, Ranjit Singh never tried to convert Muslims, or Hindus to Sikhism, even though his community remained a permanent minority in the State. Second, there, were hardly any communal riots in his times. This background and the actual administration of justice and equity was so impressive and evident to the people that respect for law was spontaneous and he never had to use strong or brutal measures to maintain or enforce the law.

Third, the cases of bribery and corruption in his kingdom were rare. The Maharaja's frequent and unexpected tours kept the local officials in check. While crime had been rampant under his immediate predecessors, it was reduced practically to the point of abolition during his reign. The cases of theft and highway robberies

were uncommon. George Keene, an observer of the Punjab scene during the Maharaja's regime stated: "In hundreds and in thousands the orderly crowds stream on. Not a bough is broken from a way side tree, not a rude remark addressed to the traveller as he treads his horse's way.<sup>68</sup> As a result many people from the Cis-Satluj states migrated to the Maharaja's territories, where there was more security for life and property, where their rights and privileges were better protected. The Maharaja provided to his subjects all the fundamental rights and basic freedoms supposed to be enshrined in any modern constitution of today.

Ranjit Singh was an enlightened ruler. He trained his armies on modern lines through his European generals like Allard, Ventura and Avitabile. A trained and disciplined army was the principal instrument that had led to western supremacy over the east in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Among Indian princes, Ranjit Singh was the first to train his army to a level at par with western armies. It was this training and discipline coupled with the Sikh ethos that his armies even in his absence and though betrayed by its generals proved a match for the British. So much that though vanquished, it commanded the unstinted praise of its opponents like General Gough. He had a remarkable capacity for inspiring loyalty among the soldiers, who were imbued with national sentiments. They showed pride in their profession and valour, faith and righteousness in their cause and conduct. This made them fight like brave soldiers against the British even after the Maharaja's death. Empire builders have often used the army as an instrument of state policy. The invariable result in all such cases is disintegration in the ranks of the army after the ruler's death. But Ranjit Singh's army undertook the responsibility of defending Punjab from the British encroachment in accordance with the Khalsa tradition. They could not save the Sikh state but even in their defeat won applause and admiration of their friends and foes. The poet Shah Muhammad in his *Jangnamah* extols the virtues of the Khalsa soldiers in the Anglo-Sikh Wars.

Though himself unlettered, the Maharaja knew the importance of education. The Gurus had bade their followers to be progressive in their outlook, always to be Sikhs or learners, to take increasing advantage of opportunities to improve their condition and knowledge as men free from the shackles of earlier prejudices, conventions and dogmas and the stranglehold of the priestly classes who claimed monopoly of knowledge. The Maharaja was



very liberal and impartial in the matter of making endowments for education. There were about four thousand schools belonging to different communities scattered over the length and breadth of his kingdom, with about one lac and twenty thousand students. These schools were mostly attached to Gurdwaras, Mosques and Temples. The Maharaja was most generous in helping the custodians of these places of learning. He also stood for modern knowledge and is said to have encouraged the learning of English and French. He also procured the services of a Christian missionary to set up English medium schools at Lahore, though without allowing him to propagate Christianity or introduce Bible in the curriculum of the schools. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's department of Charity cost the State exchequer one-tenth of the total revenues amounting nearly to twenty lakh rupees a year. This is an extremely important fact of Ranjit Singh's administration that highlights its Sikh character. The Fifth Master had prescribed for the Sikh a contribution of *Daswandh* or one tenth of his earnings towards religious cause of the society. It is indeed outstanding of Ranjit Singh's administration that he earmarked one tenth of the total revenue towards expenditure on charities and other public causes.

*Ranjit Singh's place in History:* The Maharaja gave to his citizens a consistent and uniform system of administration and a greater amount of peace and prosperity than they had enjoyed for over a century. The Mughal and the Maratha rulers in the country had been marked by bigotry, corruption, degradation, persecution, treachery, confusion, disorder, extravagance and pomp. Ranjit Singh's claim to greatness lies in the fact that he successfully faced the historical challenge of abuse of power and religious bigotry by restoring communal harmony in his state. He endowed politics with a moral purpose. His state was governed and sustained by values and attitudes that characterised the Sikh tradition. The Gurus had envisioned an egalitarian social order based on justice and freedom. With the Sikh ethos governing his psyche, Ranjit Singh translated this vision into practice.

For the first time in the Indian history a landmark was created. Mazbhis, the centuries old untouchables of the Hindu society, far from being discriminated against, became a regular component of Ranjit Singh's army. The Hindu Hill Rajputs, who had refused to co-operate with the Tenth Master on account of his giving equality to the lower castes ceased to have any compunction in working and fighting side by side with them. And his greatest

achievement was the unstinted and uncommon loyalty he commanded of all sections of his men, whether Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Rajput or European. The miracle was that this sense of comradeship was achieved just in a period of four decades, most of which time was spent in fighting and consolidation. Unlike the Muslim invaders or contemporary rulers of his times, another uncommon feature of his rule was that while he spent long periods in fighting far away from his capital, there never was a local uprising to challenge his authority. This indicates an incontrovertible belief and assessment of the people he ruled that he was not for any personal aggrandisement nor were he and his annies out for gathering any booty or loot.

*Conclusion:* From our narration of facts about the rule of Ranjit Singh it is evident that in all aspects of its functioning and administration, Ranjit Singh's rule was in sharp contrast with the rule not only of his contemporaries, but also of many modern secular administrations. Moses and Mohammed were both spiritual and political leaders. Moses was followed by kings, David and Solomon, well-known for their fairness and wisdom. Similarly, the Muslim rule in Europe, in contrast with the ghetto, repeated butchery, massacres and pogroms perpetrated by Christian monarchs, was remarkably tolerant, mild and humane towards its non-Muslim subjects. It is the lesson of history that a healthy combination of religion and politics is bound to lead to a harmonious socio-political order. It is well known that Ashoka's rule, coloured by Buddhist ethics, was a shining light among the empires of the earlier millenia. Even among modern secular rulers atleast two of the despots are notorious for their inhumanity. We refer to Hitler's elimination of six million Jews and Stalin's liquidation of his twelve million countrymen in order to make their people safe and secure for peace, prosperity and equality. Hence the inevitable conclusion that Ranjit Singh's rule, being a product of the Sikh tradition and ethos, was outstandingly humane, liberal and tolerant towards his people, including his erstwhile opponents and enemies. His rule was, undoubtedly, benign and fair, and why it was so is explained by the background of the whole-life religious thesis and ethos which conditioned and influenced it, and of which Ranjit Singh was a shining product.

Ranjit Singh's rule epitomises and demonstrates a very important principle of religion and human history, namely, the comparative role and impact of dichotomous or pacifist religions

and of whole-life or Miri-Piri religions on the life of man. So far as the Indian contemporary life, governed by dichotomous Hinduism, was concerned, there was little doubt that the discriminatory system of caste, pollution and untouchability and the dominance of the upper castes remained a fact of life in 'the Indian society, including that in the times of Shivaji. At no time could the untouchables think of working shoulder to shoulder with the upper castes. The position in the matter of social discrimination was no different in the rule of Christian monarchs upto the nineteenth century, where the ghetto for the Jews remained a cursed institution and the treatment of Muslim subjects was no less discriminatory. Arnold Toynbee finds himself caught in a web of self-contradiction, and perhaps bias as well, when, on the one hand, he condemns the diversion of religion to empirical and mundane tasks and seeks to justify and extol the pacifism and other-worldliness of the Christian mission, and, for that matter, condemns the Miri-Piri or the whole -life character of Islam; and, on the other hand, he is constrained to concede that "by contrast with the treatment of subject Jews and Muslims in the Christendom, the treatment of subject 'People of the Book' in Dar-UI-Islam has been honourably distinguished by its comparative tolerance." <sup>69</sup> This shows that it is a whole-life or a Miri-Piri system that alone is capable of making a historical impact on the life of society and man. Consequently, dichotomous or pacifist religions to the extent they keep confined to what Toynbee calls their spiritual mission (as divorced from a whole life mission) remain historically and socially barren in their influence and impact. The phenomenon of Ranjit Singh is not just a rule of a monarch. It demonstrates very clearly the historical role and impact of a whole-life or Miri-Piri religion on the society of its times.

## References

- 1     Cunningham, J.D.: *History of the Sikhs* (Reprint, New Delhi 1966), p. 120.
- 2     Kohli, Sita Ram; 'The Organisation of Ranjit Singh's Army; *Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (ed.) Teja Singh and Ganda Singh (Reprint, Patiala 1970), pp.60-61.
- 3     Prinsep, H.T.; *Origin of The Sikh Power in The Punjab and Political Life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (Reprint, Patiala 1970), pp. 142-43.
- 4     Sinha, N.K.; *Ranjit Singh* (Reprint, Calcutta 1960), pp. 189-92.

- 5 Bentley, Eric; *Century of Hero- Worship* (Boston 1957), pp. 3-8.
- 6 Macaulay, J.B.; *Lord Macaulay's Legislative Minutes* (London 1946), pp.2-3.
- 7 Toynbee, J. Arnold; *A Study of History* (Oxford 1951), p.79.
- 8 Griffin, Lepel; *Ranjit Singh* (Reprint, Delhi 1967), p. 39.
- 9 "You wear necklaces, put sacrificial marks on your foreheads, carry two *dhosis*, and put towels on your heads;  
If you know God's designs, you would know that yours is verily a vain religion.'  
Macauliffe, MA; *The Sikh Religion*, Vol.1 (Delhi 1963), p. 237;  
"The Qazi telleth lies and eateth filth. The Brahmin taken life and then batheth. The ignorant jogi knoweth not the way of union with God The whole three ruin the world."  
Macauliffe, MA; *Ibid.*, p.338.
- 10 Dhillon, G.S.; *Researches in Sikh Religion and History* (Chandigarh 1989); p. 2.
- 11 "Nanak, the Formless One is without fear; All the Rams dust;  
How many stories there are of Krishnan!  
How many Veds and religious compositions!  
Afflicted are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva:  
Yea, afflicted is the whole world."  
*Guru Granth*, p. 1153, Trans. by Gopal Singh, Vol. IV, p. 1102.
- 12 "O Whom shall we call good or evil,  
When all creatures belong to Thee. "  
*Guru Granth*, p. 383
- 13 "God is self-existent; so is His Name;  
Beside Himself He made Nature, wherein He has His seat and looks on with fondness."  
*Asa-di-Var*, Trans. Teja Singh; *Essays in Sikhism* (Lahore 1944), p. 17.
- 14 "Householders and hermits are equal, whoever calls on the name of the Lord."  
*Asa Ragni*, Trans., Cunningham; *op.cit.*, p.334.
- 15 "O Hindus, how shall the stone which itself sinketh carry you across?"  
Macauliffe, Vol.1, p.326.
- 16 *Guru Granth*, p.1046.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p.463.
- 18 Dhillon, G.S; *op.cit.*, p. 9.
- 19 Irvine, William; *Later Mughals* (Reprint, New Delhi 1971), pp. 317-18.
- 20 Archer, John Clark; *Sikhs* (Princeton 1946), p. 232.
- 21 Forster, George; *A Journey From Bengal to England*, Vol. I (Reprint, Patiala 1970), p.340.
- 22 ਜਪਦੇ ਜਾਪ ਗੁਰ ਦੇ ਪੂਰੇ, ਰਹਿੰਦੇ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪਾਸ ਹਜ਼ੂਰੇ ।  
ਕੇ ਸਾਧਾਰੀ ਸੁੰਦਰ ਸੂਰ, ਕੀਤੀ ਡਹਿਲ ਪਈ ਮਨਜ਼ੂਰੇ ।  
ਬਖਸੀ ਰਿਧਸਿਧ ਭਰਪੂਰੇ, ਖੇਤੀ ਕਰਨ ਹੰਢਾਵਨ ਭੂਰੇ ।  
ਅਬ ਸਿਰਦਾਰ ਹੇ ।  
Bir Singh ; Bara Maha Guru Gobind Singh Ji Ka (ed.) Piara Singh Padam (Patiala

- 1959), p.143
- 23 Waheeduddin, Fakir Syed; *The Real Ranjit Singh* (Karachi 1965), p. 57.
- 24 *Ibid.*, Introduction, pp. 7-8
- 25 Hugel, Baron Charles; *Travels in Kashmir and Punjab* (Reprint, Patiala 1970), p. 382.
- 26 Murray (Captain); *History of The Punjab*, Vol.II (Reprint, Patiala 1970), p. 175.
- 27 Henry, T. Prinsep; *Origin of The Sikh Power in the Punjab* (Reprint, Patiala 1970), p.148.
- 28 Dhillon, G.S.; *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.
- 29 Waheeduddin; *op.cit.*, p. 57.
- 30 Sarkar, S.C. and Datta, K.K., *Modern Indian History* (Allahabad 1957), P. 180.
- 31 Segal, Ronald; *The Crisis of India* (Bombay 1968), p.79.
32. Macrindle, J.W.; *Ancient India As Described by Magathenes and Arian* (Calcutta 1926), p. 214;  
Al-Bairuni, *Al-Hind* (Punjabi Trans. Yog Dhyan Ahuja) (Patiala 1970), p. 362; Elliot and Dowson; *History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, Vol. I (Allahabad 1969), p. 184.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 Elliot, Charles; *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Vol. 11 (Reprint, London 1962), p. 211;  
Joshi, L.M., *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture of India* (Delhi 1967), pp. 395-403.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 Parkash, Buddha, *Aspects of Indian History and Culture* (Agra 1965), p. 215.
- 37 Qanungo, S.N., 'Decline And Fall of The Maratha Power' in Majumdar, R.C. (ed.) *The History And Culture of The Indian People: The Maratha Supremacy* (Bombay 1971), pp. 515-16.
38. Hans, Surjit, 'The Gurbials in The Early Ninetenth Century' in the *Journal of Regional History*, Vol.II, 1981, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, p.56.
- 39 "The position was further complicated by the minority status of the rulers. Thus the bonds with the Hindu constituency had to be strengthened. The Muslim population had to be pacified not only administratively but also doctrinally." *Ibid.*
- 40 Osborne, W.G., *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Singh* (London 1840), pp. 94-95.
- 41 Hugel, Baron Charles, *op. cit.*, pp. 292-93.
- 42 Cunningham, J.D., *op.cit.*, pp. 48.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 44 Bhangu, Rattan Singh, *Prachin Panth Parkash* (ed.) Bhai Vir Singh (Amritsar 1962), pp. 291-96.
- 45 Cunningham, J.D., *op.cit.*, p. 92.
- 46 "He (Ranjit Singh) raised the alien hill Dogras, Dhyan Singh, Khushal Singh Gulab Singh, almost from the gutter to positions of supreme authority in the civil apparatus of his government, and Tej Singh, an insignificant Brahmin of the Gangetic-Doab and Lal Singh another Brahmin from Gandhara valley, were granted such influence which eventually raised to the supreme command

of the Sikh Army, and thus he dug his own grave, the grave of his descendents, and paved the way to the eventual enslavement of the Sikh people." Kapur Singh, Parasarprasana (ed.)

Madanjit Kaur and Piar Singh (Amritsar 1989), p.239.

- 47 Teja Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 103.
- 48 Sinha, N.K., *op. cit.*, p. 149.
- 49 Khullar, K.K., *Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (New Delhi 1980), p. 185.
- 50 Lawrence, H.M.L., *Adventures of An Officer in Punjab*, Vol. I (Reprint, Paitala 1970), pp.30-31.
- 51 Griffin, Lepel, *Ranjit Singh* (Reprint, Delhi 1970), pp. 98-99.
- 52 Sen, S.N., 'Marathas and North Indian States in Majumdar, R.C. (ed.), *The History And Culture of The Indian People: The Maratha Supremacy*, Vol. III (Bombay 1977), p. 419.
- 53 Hunter, W.W., *The Marquess of Dalhousie* (Oxford 1895), p. 99;  
Yadav, Kirpal Chandra, 'British Policy Towards Sikhs, 1849-57' in Harbans Singh and Barrier, N. Gerald (ed.), *Essays In Honour of Dr. Ganda Singh* (Patiala 1976), pp. 189-91;  
.Khushwant Singh, *A History of The Sikhs*, Vol. 2; 1839-1964 (Delhi 1977), pp. 94-95.
- 54 Segal, Ronald, *op.cit.* p. 80.
- 55 Datta, K.K., 'Destruction of The Mughal Empire' in Majumdar, R.C (ed.), *The History And Culture of The Indian People*, Vol. VIII (Bombay 1977), pp. 117-18, 352-53.
- 56 Parekh, Manilal C, *Christian Proselytism In India* (Bombay 1947), pp. 12, 20, 36-37;  
Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Inquiry Committee, Madhya Pradesh, 1956, p. 66, Quoted by Patel, Baburao; *Footprints of Christ* (Bombay 1979), pp. 4-5.
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 Guru Granth, p. 74.
- 59 Murray (Captain), *op.cit.*, p. 174.
- 60 Guru Granth, p. 85.
- 61 Chopra, G.L., *The Punjab As a Sovereign State* (Hoshiarpur 1960), p. 137.
- 62 Banga, Indu, *Agrarian Systems Of The Sikhs* (New Delhi 1978), pp. 63-64.
- 63 Sinha, N.K., *op.cit.*, p. 142.
- 64 Banga, Indu, *op.cit.*, p. 191.
- 65 Waheeduddin; *op.cit.*, pp. 31-33.
- 66 *Ibid.*
- 67 *Ibid*
- 68 George Keene, quoted by Khullar, K.K., *op.cit.*, p. 198.
- 69 Toynbee, Arnold; *An Historian's Approach To Religion* (London 1956), P.90.

## FROM RITUAL TO COUNTER RITUAL: A Critical analysis.

GURBAKHS SINGH

### *A. Oberoi's Assumptions*

The very first paragraph of Oberoi's above mentioned paper makes it clear to a reader that it is full of many incorrect and anti-Sikh statements. The author tells that the Sikhs were (are) hardly different from the Hindus, at least till 1897 when Kahn Singh denied it. This is the fallacious base on which the author has attempted to build a wrong thesis.

He states, "In 1897 when Kahn Singh Nabha, the erudite Sikh scholar, proclaimed through a vernacular tract that Ham Hindu Nahin (We are not Hindus), he brought almost four centuries of Sikh traditions to an end. Until then the Sikhs had shown little collective interest in distinguishing themselves from the Hindus. Sikh notions of time, space, corporeality, holiness, kinship, social distinctions, purity pollution, and commensality were hardly different from those of the Hindus. Also the two shared the same territory, language, rites de passage, dietary taboos, festivals, ritual personal and key theological doctrines".

### *B. Observations of some scholars*

Before showing the statement of Oberoi to be totally propagandist, because of its being based on incorrect assumptions, let us first quote the observations of some modern scholars and mystics about Sikhism:

*Drothy Field:* Pure Sikhism is far above dependence on Hindu rituals and is capable of a distinct position as a world religion so long as Sikhs maintain their distinctiveness..... A reading of the Granth suggests that Sikhism should be regarded as a new and separate world religion rather than a reformed sect of Hinduism.

*Arnold Toynbee:* In this coming religious debate, the Sikh religion and its scriptures, the Adi Granth, will have something special of value to say to the rest of the world.

*Pearl S. Buck:* They (Sikh scripture) speak to person of nay religion or of none. They speak for the human heart and the searching mind.

*H.L. Bradshaw:* Sikhs must cease to think of their faith as just another good religion and must begin to think in terms of Sikhism being the religion for this new age.....it completely supplants and fulfils all the former dispensations of older religions Guru Granth Sahib of all the world religious scriptures, alone states that there are innumerable worlds and universes other than our own.

*W.O.Cole:* In his 1985 key note lecture in India on the Mission and message of Guru Nanak Dev: Sikhism is the only religion which welcomes each and everyone to its langar without any discrimination of caste, creed, colour, or sex.

Remember the tenets of Guru Nanak, his concepts of oneness of God and Universal Brotherhood of man. If any community holds the key to national integration of India, it is the Sikhs all the way.

*Swami Nitya Nand:* In his book *Guru Gian*: I constantly meditate on Waheguru revealed by Nanak. I practised Yoga Asnas under the guidance of Yogis and did that for many years. The bliss and peace, which I enjoy now, was never obtained earlier.

#### *C. Analysis of the Assumptions*

Oberoï considered many Sikh notions and ideas to be hardly different from those of Hindus. Actually, the Hindu & the Sikh notions on various aspects of life are quite different. Gurbani references can be quoted to prove that not only they are different, but in some cases they are also opposed to each other, leaving no ground for Oberoï's thesis.

##### *1. Time and Space:*

(a) Hindus believe in the cycle of four *yugas*. Satyug is the period of truthfulness and highest morality. The light of truth decreased through the Treta and Dwapar Yugas. The Kalyug is the period of dominance of evil over good. Gurmat denies both these concepts, the division of time in yugas and the decrease of morality in time. It says that Time is continuous, its beginning or end is not known to any religious leader or prophet. The system of grouping time in yugas is arbitrary in the same way as the invention of the 7-day week and the naming of the days. There is no sanctity about this dicision of time. To quote Guru Nanak:

‘What the hour and occasion,  
What the date and day,  
What the season and month -



When the creation began?  
 Had Brahmins found the answer,  
 In their scriptures would they have recorded it;  
 Nor have the Kazis known from Koranic record.  
 The yogi knows not the date and day, season or month;  
 The creator who made the universe,  
 alone knows the answer<sup>1</sup>."

(b) Hindus believe some days and activities to be holy and auspicious for worship; others are considered unholy and inauspicious i.e. for purchasing new things, visiting relatives, engagements or marriage ceremonies, etc. For them the full moon, the new moon, the beginning of a solar month, etc., are important and significant in relation to religious or temporal activities.

Sikhism rejects such notions as superstition. Says the Guru:

"Observing dates and days from duality arises.  
 Without the holy Preceptor's guidance all is pitch dark.  
 Worship of dates and days is the way of deluded ignorant

persons. <sup>2</sup>"

"All months, days and moments to such are auspicious,  
 As the Lord's grace have obtained. <sup>3</sup>

(c) According to Hindu belief the universe consists of three divisions: Dharti (Earth), Patal (Nether region) and Akash (Upper region). Gurmat tells us that there are innumerable levels or regions and suns. To quote Guru Nanak:

"Of the nether worlds and heavens has He created millions.  
 Men have given up the count in despair.  
 His Infinity no one may measure or state,  
 Men's lives are spent in the effort,  
 Saith Nanak. Know that He is supreme, all-knowing<sup>4</sup>."

## 2. Holiness:

(a) Hindus believe in the holiness of certain places, rivers animals and species of trees. Gurmat says that the only thing holy or sacred is Naam, the Lord's Name or the people who love it.

Where the holy place their feet,  
 that is equivalent to the sixty-eight pilgrim-spots.  
 Where the Name is uttered, is Paradise<sup>5</sup>."

(b) Hindus believe in the holiness of idols and their worship. According to Gurbani it is God's Name, the Word (Gian) which is holy, and not any idol. Worship of idols is strictly prohibited in Sikhism:  
 "Those that call a stone their God,

Wasted is their devotion.  
 Those that fall at the feet of stone-idols,  
 Wasted is their endeavour<sup>6</sup>."

### 3. *Purity and Pollution:*

(a) Hindus believe in the sacredness and importance of ritualism. Pollution can be removed by washing with the Ganga-jal, water from the river Ganges. For example, Mr. Jagjivan Ram, a low-caste but a distinguished person and Number Two in the Ministry of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, unveiled the statue, of a high-caste Hindu. The upper-caste Hindus protested that the touch of a low-caste Jagjivan Ram had polluted the statue. To remove its pollution it was washed with Ganga-jal ceremoniously. The Gurus reject the whole concept of pollution and purity.

"Should man observe purifying rituals day and night,  
 His impurity of mind would still not be shed<sup>7</sup>."

In Gurmat, considering anybody a low-caste, is itself polluted thinking, since God resides in every heart:

"Break no heart-know, each being is a priceless jewel.  
 Each heart is a jewel; evil it is to break any;  
 Shouldst thou seek to find the Beloved, break no one's hearts.<sup>8</sup>"

One wonders how any writer can ignore all this and state that Hindus and Sikhs have no different philosophy regarding purity and pollution.

(b) Hindus consider Brahmins to be the holiest persons, and the Sudras to be polluted, Guru Nanak strongly protested against this and founded the institutions of Sangat and Pangat, to remove this wrong Hindu thought from the minds of people. Guru Nanak refers to this as follows:

"In man's mind foul thinking is the drummer woman,  
 Hard-heartedness the she-butcher,  
 Slandering of others the scavenger-woman,  
 By the low-caste wrath is he deluded;  
 What good is the line of ritual purity in the kitchen,  
 With these untouchables sitting by his side?"

### 4. *Territory and Language:*

According to Oberoi, if the people share the same language and territory, they have the same faith. Because the Hindus and the Sikhs shared the same territory and language in the Punjab, he wants us to believe that "they were not different." But why does the author exclude Muslims who were also there, shared the same language and the same territory? Even today Muslims are living in

the Punjab (Malerkotla) and speaking the same language and sharing the same land. Are they, too, no different from Hindus?

#### 5. *Dietary Taboos:*

This is another unique thesis presented by Oberoi. He says that if dietary taboos are the same, people have the same faith. In other words, if people have different food habits, they belong to different faiths. It is obviously difficult to accept this argument. It is common knowledge that Christians in Africa and India, have food habits and taboos, completely different from those of Christians in Europe.

In fact, Guru Nanak totally rejected the food philosophy and taboos of Hindus:

(a) To the vegetarian Hindus who consider themselves superior for not eating meat, Guru Nanak says:

“Over the fetish of flesh dispute blind fools,  
Of enlightenment and contemplation ignorant.  
What is flesh, What vegetation?  
What to sin leads<sup>10</sup>

(b) Eating beef is a taboo with Hindus. Guru Nanak, however, prescribed a different taboo for his Sikhs saying:

“To grab what is another’s, is evil.

As pig’s flesh to the Muslim and Cow’s flesh to the Hindu.<sup>11</sup>”

(c) Fasting is an important ritual for Hindu women, and is supposed to have great religious value. Among Sikhs, however, it has no significance:

“Those discarding food, practise hypocrisy.  
Such are neither like married women, nor widows.  
By the discarding of food,  
no one attains union with the Lord<sup>12</sup>.”

#### 6. *Festivals:*

Public festivals are celebrated by a community in a locality. They are not always tied to a religion. In some cases a festival and a religious day fall on the same day, creating a misunderstanding to an outside observer, that people celebrating a particular festival, belong to the same faith.

#### 7. *Rituals:*

The Bani in the Guru Granth Sahib repeatedly reminds us that rituals have no value. It is the moral deeds of a person which God accepts. Below are a few examples of how Gurmat rejects Hindu rituals (considered to be Sikh rituals by Oberoi). Cremation of a dead body: For Hindus it is a religious ceremony during which

certain rituals have to be performed, just before death, before cremation and after cremation. Gurmat tells us that all these rituals are futile, which neither benefit nor harm the soul.

“Should any apply sandalwood paste to a corpse,  
What gain out of it shall he get?  
Should the corpse in filth be thrown about,  
What would it then lose<sup>13</sup>

And then there is the Hindu belief that the fruit of actions or rituals performed by a Brahmin, after the death of a person, reaches his soul. Guru Nanak’s comment on this is very revealing:

“Should a burglar rob some house,  
and out of his booty offer charity in his manes’ name;  
In the hereafter shall the offering be recognised?  
And the manes be branded as thieves;  
And judgement shall be that mediator’s hands  
be chopped off.

Saith Nanak; In the hereafter is received reward for  
what man from his own earning offers<sup>14</sup>

Marriages among Sikhs can be performed on any convenient day, whereas among Hindus an auspicious date and time have to be worked out by a Brahmin.

In conclusion we can say that rites-de-passage of Sikhs are different from those of Hindus. Even if outwardly they might appear to be similar, the Sikh philosophy is independent of Hindu thought.

#### 8. *Key Theological Doctrines:*

Oberoï has not mentioned even a single key concept which is common.

(a) Concept of God: Hindus believe in Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh) and other gods including Dharam Raj, Indra, Sun, Moon, etc. They also believe in many Avatars (God incarnates in human form), and address them as Bhagwan(God), e.g., Bhagwan Ram, Bhagwan Krishna, etc., Gurmat rejects this entire philosophy lock, stock and barrel. The Guru says:

“Burnt be the mouth that asserts, the Lord takes birth.  
He is neither born nor dies; neither enters birth nor departs.  
All pervasive is Nanak’s Lord<sup>15</sup>. ”

Not the three gods mentioned above (as believed by Hindus), but God Himself is the Creator, the Operator, and the Destroyer of the universe:

“His self He created, and manifested His Name.

Then the second object, expanse of the universe He made;  
 Settled on His cushion, in joy He beheld it.  
 Thou solely the Bestower and Creator;  
 in Thy pleasure dost grant boons and show grace.  
 All to Thee is known; by Thy command dost confer life  
 and take it back;  
 Seated on Thy cushion, creation dost Thou behold in joy<sup>16</sup>. ”

The Guru says that neither Dharam Raj nor any other gods have any authority, power or competence. The poor fellows just consider themselves lucky, if they got a chance to stand outside His door to sing the virtues of the Lord. It means that they are of no significance. There are innumerable Brahmas, Krishnas, etc., created by God.

(b) Hindus believe that after death, our souls will be judged in the court of Dharam Raj, and sent into heaven or hell. Gurbani denies the existence of any Dharam Raj, or any place designated as heaven or hell. Gurmat says that when one remembers God, he is in heaven. And if he forgets God, he is in hell.<sup>17</sup>

(c) Caste System: Hindu caste system is the steel net of Brahminism to keep all people, rich and poor, under the control of Brahmins. To deliver people from this bondage Gurmat broke this frame and destroyed all its dividing walls created by Brahmanism, into caste groups. Guru Granth says:

Of me father are we all children;  
 Thou my Preceptor<sup>18</sup>. ”  
 “If thou dost claim to be a Brahmin by thy birth  
 from a Brahmin woman,  
 Wpy was thy birth not from a different source<sup>19</sup>  
 “Thou ignorant fool, entertain not the pride of caste;  
 By such pride manifold evils arise<sup>20</sup>. ”

(d) Brahminism is not willing to accept women as human beings equal to men nor are they fit to perform any religious rites. A son who may have to be adopted, and not a real daughter, can perform the prescribed rituals after death of her parents. This philosophy gives an inferior status to women. Guru Nanak decried this discrimination, and asked: ”How can you denigrate a woman, who gives birth to kings?”

#### *D. The Second Aspect*

Oberoi has made a few wrong assumptions to build his thesis: “The pluralistic framework of Sikh faith in the nineteenth century allowed its adherents to belong to anyone of the following

traditions: Udasi, Nirmala, Suthreshahi, Khalsa, Sangatshahi, Jitmali, Bakhatmali, Mihanshahi, Sahajdhari, Kuka, and Sarwaria. Many of these Sikhs shaved their heads freely smoked tobacco and hashish, and were not particular about maintaining the five external symbols of the faith.....There simply was no single source of authority within the Sikh tradition and thus several competing definitions of what constituted a "Sikh" were possible. For this reason it is fundamentally futile to seek to define what was the essence of the Sikh faith in the nineteenth century. Sikh personhood and practice for much of the nineteenth century implied a series of changing relationships and subjective moods".

"However, in the late nineteenth century a growing body of Sikhs took active part in a systematic campaign to redefine their faith and purge it of what they saw as Hindu accretions and a Brahmanical stranglehold over their ritual."

In his childhood Guru Nanak Dev befriended a low caste poor Muslim whom he called Bhai (Brother) Mardana. Both travelled and lived together all their lives. Many Muslims loved Nanak as their Pir. The folk song "Nanak Shah Fakir; Hindu Ka Guru, Musalman Ka Pir" is there to describe his popularity with the Hindus and Muslims alike. Mian Mir, a Muslim, laid the foundation of the Golden Temple. Paindey Khan, a leader of the defending forces of the Guru, was a Muslim. At the time of Guru Amar Das, one of the preachers was Muslim-born Allah Yar Khan. Many Muslims smoke and shave their heads. Many Hindus do the same. To conclude from this that Sikhs also shave their beards and smoke freely, is dearly illogical and perverse.

Gurmat says that "The Lord is no one's property"<sup>21</sup>. What Guru Nanak preached, was meant, not just for Sikhs who would accept him as their Guru, but for everyone, whether a Hindu, a Muslim, a Yogi, a Nath or a Sidh. In other words Gurmat is not the property of Sikhs alone, but, like modern science, it is for everyone who wishes to avail oneself of it. In case, some people, other than Sikhs, believe in the teachings of Guru Nanak, without leaving some of their old beliefs, and practise a mixture of rituals, neither the Sikhs have the right to force these people to give up their old rituals, nor have such persons themselves or any scholar the right to claim that they are the representatives of the Sikhs, and that whatever they practise, is approved by Gurmat.

If some Udasis or any other group had some association with the Gurus, or even had relations with them, while continuing to

follow non-Sikh rituals, it is wrong to list them among Sikhs of the Gurus. To be called a Sikh one has to follow Sikh practices, as described by the Gurus and also give up non-Sikh rituals. The Sikhs have their own Scripture and way of life, which cannot be confused with those of Hindus.

To explain the above a parallel example can be given from the West. We know some Christians do not eat meat (many more of them are giving it up). From this, one cannot conclude that Christians are vegetarian by faith. Similarly, from persons who keep long hair (Many Hindu Yogis do even today), worship idols, it is wrong to conclude that Sikhs believe in idolatry. Nor can existence of aberrations like adultery and use of drugs among Christians mean that the Bible, The Guide for a Christian, approves of them or the faults are a Christian practice.

Because of his wrong assumptions, Oberoi makes factual mistakes as well. For example, he writes: "In 1915 Arur Singh, a manager of the Golden Temple, in a highly controversial move, ordered the removal of all Hindu idols that had been lodged in the precincts of the holy shrine for several generations."

It may be stated that this decision was taken by Mr. King, the then Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, and not by Arur Singh. The latter did only what the British Government wanted him to do. (Arur Singh, even blessed General Dyer for his "bravery" for the mass murder of people in Jallianwala Bagh in April 1919). Actually it was the Sikhs who convinced Mr. King by quoting the authority of hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib, that idol worship was against Sikhism. After full satisfaction on this point, Mr. King ordered the removal of idols from the premises of the Golden Temple.

By describing the order as "controversial" the author takes the stand that idol worship is approved by Gurmat, and that the objection to the removal of idols was justified. This shows complete ignorance of the author regarding Sikhism and Gurbani. Such value judgements by the author without citing the authority or knowledge of Guru Granth Sahib, is just preposterous.

To leave no doubt about his unjustified thesis that Sikhs had gone astray from the "original" Sikh faith, he states: "However, in the late nineteenth century, a growing body of Sikhs took active part in a systematic campaign to redefine their faith and purge it of what they saw as Hindu accretions and a Brahmanical stranglehold over their rituals."

Such ignorance of the Guru Granth can be displayed only at a platform where the listeners are as ignorant of the doctrines in the Granth Sahib, as the author himself.

It is agreed that the Sikh faith has been defined to make it independent of Hindu rituals and their philosophy; but Oberoi holds wrong people responsible for it. It was Guru Nanak, and not Bhai Kahan Singh or the “growing body of Sikhs”, who defined it. Further it is defined in the Guru Granth and the lives of the Gurus. The Guru refused to put on a Janju or to accept Hindu mythology and philosophy. He loved everyone equally including Muslims and the so-called low castes and untouchables detested by the Brahminical order. Further, the Gurus did not accept Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, the three highest gods of Hindus, the existence of Hindu Amrit, besides numerous other Hindu doctrines and practices.

The whole discussion boils down to the fact that Oberoi's thesis has no basis. He appears to be completely innocent of the knowledge and existence of Gurbani, which clearly and emphatically rejects the Hindu philosophy, the rituals and their religious values. After accepting Gurbani as the base of Sikh faith, one has no choice, but to agree that the Gurus founded a faith independent of the then existing faiths. And Bhai Kahan Singh did nothing more than invoking its authority.

*Oberoi concluded:*

“It is my thesis that the absence of any malice between Sikhs and Hindus was the result of an elaborate cultural code in which members of the two traditions adhered to the same rules or social organisation and rites de passage.”

The statement reveals another meaningless assertion of the author. For, it assumes that followers of different cultures must have malice, and that people having the same culture and rites de passage must have no malice. We find both these assumptions to be wrong all over the world. During the Sikh rule the Sikhs displayed no malice even against Muslims, some of whom had persecuted them. During their struggle with the Muslims, the behaviour of the Sikhs with their adversaries was exemplary. Oberoi's thesis falls when tested to evaluate the Muslim and Sikh relations. Sikhs did not ill-treat Muslims or nursed ill-will or malice against Muslim residents of Punjab, even when they were being hounded and murdered by Muslim rulers. Here is what a Muslim writes about Sikhs of the 18th century:



“In no case would they slay a coward...nor plunder the wealth or ornaments of a woman... no adultery.....no thief at all nor is there any house-breaker born among them.”

*Concluding Remarks :*

The following may help reveal the facts in true perspective: The faith, later called Sikhism, was founded by Guru Nanak, and the people were educated for two centuries how to live according to that faith and obtain peace in their life. The core of the direction consists of:

- God is the Creator of all mankind, therefore we are equal.
- To love God we should love people (His children).
- Worship of idols or graves and practice of other hollow rituals have no value.
- Dividing human beings into low or high castes is a sin.
- Considering any religion, community or sect as superior or inferior is against the law of God.
- There is no place like heaven or hell, and there is no person like Dharam Raj to judge our actions. God Himself decides everything in the universe.

The complete rejection of Brahminism and their philosophy by the Gurus themselves (not started by Bhai Kahn Singh, as mistakenly assumed by the author) made people revolt against the hegemony of the Brahmins. Gurus used very strong words to expose these religious and political blood-suckers of society:

“The Muslim judge utters falsehood and eats filth;  
The Brahmin guilty of slaughter of humanity,  
makes show of pious bathing;  
The yogi, blind of insight, knows not the true praxis. The devices  
of all three ruin mankind<sup>22</sup>.”

“Rulers are turned beasts of prey, their officers,hounds;  
None do they allow in peace to rest.

The subordinates wound the people with their claws:  
You dogs, lick on the blood and marrow of the poor.

Know... All such will be disgraced and branded as false<sup>23</sup>.”

After the annexation of Punjab, Mahants who were patronised by the Britishers started following the directions of the Brahmins, and introduced many anti-Sikh practices in the Gurdwaras to increase their income and visitors or pilgrims of those Hindu converts to Sikhism who became Sikhs during Sikh Rule and again reverted to Hinduism after annexation of Punjab. Safe from protests of the Sikhs, these stooges of the Government

gave up the practice and teachings of Sikh principles of service and sacrifice. They started living an immoral and anti-Sikh life. Women who went to the Gurdwaras, were often molested, cases of even rape are on record. Because of Brahminical influence, the Sikh converts from the so-called low castes, were not respected as Sikh pilgrims, but were treated as in Hindu temples untouchables and insulted. They had nobody to fear, the British being at their back. There was much more than that. This gave birth to the Gurdwara movement. The stand of the British government was that Mahants had the sole right over the properties of the Gurdwaras and the practice of rituals there. The Sikhs had to struggle against this,

putting everything at stake, even their lives. They had to pay a heavy price for this, and suffer hundreds of deaths, thousands of permanent injuries, confiscation of their real estates and their properties, loss of their pensions, medals, and payment of fines, etc. It is this struggle, regarding which the author writes in a derogatory tone, that "a growing body of Sikhs to redefine their faith and purge it of what they saw as Hindu accretions." The truth is that the Sikhs had to make unparalleled sacrifices to re-establish Sikh practices in the Gurdwaras, and stop wrong practices introduced by the greedy, licentious and vicious Mahants.

Obero's paper is a classic case of how ignorance of the Scripture of the Sikhs and three hundred years of the history of their struggle, sacrifices and martyrdoms, makes for poor study, and no amount of verbose assertions can be a substitute of patient and serious academic work. It reminds us of the story of Plato's men in the cave. Religions are not defined or redefined by class room lectures or sheltered writers. Could there be thousands of Christian martyrs for centuries on end, without a Christ on the Cross and the Christian gospels? And, could there be a resurgent Christian Church and Society, without the sufferings and sacrifices of the early Christians in the first centuries of the Christian era?

Sikhism has been defined by the spiritual experience of the Gurus recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib and their lives and martyrdoms spread over two hundred years. It was this definition that enabled the Sikhs to rise again despite the repeated orders of the Mugul Administrations that no Sikh should remain alive in its domain and the fixation of an ample reward for every Sikh killed. Religions are defined by the Spiritual experiences of the Prophets, and that definition is brought home to a people by the blood of sufferings and martyrdoms. Such definitions once made, can be invoked but

not redefined or altered. We wonder if ignorance of Sikh Scripture or religious history, as in the case of Oberoi, can ever lead to any worthwhile academic understanding of it or its sociological developments.

## REFERENCES

- 1 Adl Granth : "Japu Ji"
- 2 Ibid: Page 843
- 3 Ibid: "Bara Maha", Majh M-5:page 136
- 4 Ibid: "Japu Ji"
- 5 Ibid: Ramkali M-5; page 890
- 6 Ibid: Page 1160
- 7 Ibid: Page 265
- 8 Ibid: Page 1384
- 9 Ibid:Page 91
- 10 Ibid:Page 1289
- 11 Ibid: Page 141
- 12 Ibid: Page 873
- 13 Ibid:Page 1160
- 14 Ibid:Asa di Var: M-1:page 472
- 15 Ibid: Page 1136
- 16 Ibid: Asa di Var, M-I; page 463
- 17 Ibid: Page 749
- 18 Ibid: Page 611
- 19 Ibid : Page 324
- 20 Ibid: Page 1128
- 21 Ibid: Page 658
- 22 Ibid: Page 622
- 23 Ibid: Page 1288

## 18

SOME UNEXAMINED ASSUMPTIONS IN WESTERN  
STUDIES OF SIKHISM

JAMES R. LEWIS

Among Western students of the Sikh religion, it has become commonplace to observe, directly or by implication, the supposedly baneful effects of orthodoxy on Sikh scholars studying their own tradition. To cite one comparatively non-judgemental example:

Sikh studies in the Punjab is an expression of a scholarship of the traditional type which is in conformity with currently accepted orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup>

The implication in this observation is that while Western academics are free to produce truly objective scholarship, Sikh academics, regrettably, are not. I am, of course, exaggerating the point, but such over statement allows us to see the position clearly enough to be able to turn the issue around and question one of its principal assumptions- Do non-Sikh academics really bring an objective, unprejudiced perspective to their work? To anyone familiar with the contemporary ferment in such areas as hermeneutics<sup>2</sup>, philosophy of science<sup>3</sup>, post-structuralism<sup>4</sup>, etc, the answer to this question must be “no”,

In the latter part of the Twentieth Century, it has been forcefully brought home to us that-despite our best efforts to be as neutral and as objective as possible—we inevitably bring certain presuppositions to the task of understanding. Thus the agenda which Sikh academics bring to their work is not inherently different (except for the fact of being more conscious, and hence, one could argue, less pernicious) than the various agendas of Western academics.<sup>5</sup> Examples of the kinds of interpretations imposed on Sikhs by Western observers are easier to perceive in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century accounts than in contemporary scholarship.

The clearest and certainly the most well-known example is the narrow and overtly prejudiced Christian perspective<sup>6</sup> which Ernest Trumpp brought to his translation of the sacred scripture of the Sikhs? e.g. his comment that the *Adi Granth* was “perhaps the most shallow and empty book that exists, in proportion to its size.” The influence of an individual’s Christian background need not, however, always be either negative or fully conscious; e.g., the observation of Major James Browne that the Sikh religion “appears to bear the kind of relation to the Hindoo religion, which the protestant does to the Romish”.<sup>8</sup> Although not an accurate opinion (Sikhs do not view themselves as reformed Hindus), Browne’s remark well demonstrates how, when a person’s intention is to record objective information (or even to pass a favourable judgement, as appears to have been part of Browne’s intent here), his or her background unconsciously shapes, and in this case distorts, his or her perception.

The focus of the present paper will be on the treatment of Sikhism by current (second half of the Twentieth Century) Western (mostly North American) scholars of religion. Their portrayals of the Sikhs are, like Browne’s, not consciously prejudicial, but (and again like Browne) their categories of analysis tend inevitably to distort as much as they reveal. These categories are, as will be seen, far more subtle than Trumpp’s or Browne’s. To uncover their structure and to demonstrate their distorting effects, I have resorted to two indirect approaches: (1) In the first part of the paper I will go over some of the earlier Sikh scholarship produced by British administrators. This examination will enable us, to gain a clearer sense of how the interest and commitments of the observer enter into the production of apparently neutral, descriptive “knowledge”. (2) In the second part of the paper, I will pick out certain specific items from contemporary scholarly discourse about Sikhs—syncretism, neo-Sikhism, and the early pacifism/late militancy distinction— and contrast them with comparable discourse about Western religious traditions. The differential deployment of these apparently neutral terms of analysis will enable us to uncover the value judgements embedded in them.

#### *Early British Accounts*

The earliest accounts of the Sikhs by the British are, as stated above, instructive because they permit us to see how the presuppositions and interests of the observer shape his or her understanding and interpretation of phenomena. The British in

India were very clearly not disinterested scholars.

They were, instead, practical men with self-conscious political interests; "Officials felt that they had to know more about Sikhs in order to deal with them."<sup>9</sup> Such concerns not only set the agenda for which aspects of the Sikh phenomenon were picked out for examination, but they also shaped the interpretation of the phenomenon.

Henry T. Prinsep, for instance, wrote his *origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*<sup>10</sup> at a time when the British were anxious about a possible Russian invasion from the Northwest, and a time when the kingdom of Ranjit Singh stood between the British and the Russians. As one might anticipate, his study of the Sikhs focussed on their political and military exploits. However, in addition to determining his choice of material, Prinsep's political interests also caused him to interpret the Sikh religion as being "essentially political in nature"<sup>11</sup>; i.e., motivation which governed Prinsep's own activity was projected (unconsciously) into the Sikhs.

Another characteristic of early British thinking about India which we want to note is how certain interpretations became established in habitual, taken-for-granted ways of talking about India and Indians. A good example of what I mean by this is the set of interpretations which came to be expressed in the term "martial race". What probably originated as simply a shorthand way of referring to Indian people with a history of militancy (and thus a determinant of who was recruited into the Indian army) eventually expanded to encompass a rather elaborate, pseudo-scientific theory about the effects of the environment on the human species. The full-blown martial race theory was a theory of racial deterioration which claimed to take into account the effect of prolonged years of varying religions on their adherents of early marriage, of premature brides, and juvenile eroticism, of a thousand years of malaria and hook-worm, and other ills of neglected sanitation in a hot climate, and the deteriorating effect of aeons of tropical sun in races that were once white and lived in uplands and on cool steppes.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the term "martial race," which in the Nineteenth Century carried the sense of being a neutral, descriptive statement about an obvious fact, actually functioned as part of a racist ideology which served to help legitimate British rule of India. With respect to the Sikhs community, for example, martial race theory

served to “keep Sikhs largely out of administrative and professional jobs in Punjab which were dubbed as non-martial in character and hence unsuited to the genius of the warlike Sikhs”.<sup>13</sup>

This is not to assert, however, the British administrators consciously “invented” the theory of martial races and then cynically foisted the notion onto their unsuspecting subjects— the English generally accepted the idea as readily and unreflectively as did the Indians. (Indian communities quarreled over who should be designated as “martial”, not over the notion itself.<sup>14</sup>) But rather, like Prinsep’s idea of the political nature of Sikhism, the evolution of the term—and its acquisition of ideological connotations—was shaped unconsciously by the interest and assumptions of British imperialism.

One final notion from his earlier period that I wish to examine is the civilized/savage (or civilized/primitive, civilized/ uncivilized, etcetera) distinction. Like the theory of martial races, the civilized/savage distinction appeared to have the status of a neutral fact while actually embodying part of the ideology of British imperialism. The ideological dimension of this distinction can be seen in the well-known (to students of Sikh history) remarks of John Malcolm where he explained why the English should study the Sikhs:

The most savage states are those who have the most prejudices, and who are consequently most easily conciliated or offended:

they are always pleased and flattered, when they find,  
that those whom they cannot but admit to possess  
superior intelligence, are acquainted with their  
history....<sup>15</sup>

One of missing terms here is “civilised,” but its implied presence is indicated by the term “savage”; i.e., civil zed and savage are polar ideas which make sense only in opposition to one another. Other-missing terms which can be extracted by the same logic of polar concepts— are “inferior intelligence” and “least prejudices.” If we outline this implied structure, we get something like the following:

<b>British</b>	<b>Sikhs</b>
Civilized	Savage
Superior	inferior
Intelligent	not intelligent
Unprejudiced	prejudiced

By drawing out the implications of this short statement, we acquire enough information to get a sense of what is at stake in the civilized/savage distinction: “Civilized” and “savage” are value-judgements about superiority and inferiority rather than neutral, descriptive terms.

John Malcolm is an instructive person to examine in this regard because he is generally acknowledged to be a fair and accurate observer (Considering the limitations of his position and the early period at which he wrote) of the Sikhs. Hence it is reasonable to assume that Malcom’s reliance on such categories as civilized and savage was not intentionally malicious. Rather, these terms were part of the unquestioned framework of assumptions which Europeans, including Malcolm, brought to their interpretation of non-Europeans.

The civilized/savage distinction clearly serves to legitimate imperialism (civilised nations conquer savage nations in order to bring them the benefits of “civilization”), but the roots of this distinction spring from a deeper, unconscious source. As indicated in a wide variety of contemporary studies of various forms of prejudice,<sup>16</sup> human beings have a deep-seated need to contrast themselves with “others”, and thereby to gain a clearer sense of themselves. The “others” (who may be members of a different race, a different religion, etcetera) are made to serve as mirrors on to which “we” project inverted images of ourselves (or of what we ( think we are). Thus if we place particular value on our rationality, for example, we tend to see others as irrational (e.g. the traditional Europeans distinction between the “rational” West and the “irrational” East). Like the other phenomena examined above, this tendency causes the observer to distort unconsciously the object of his or her investigation.

To recapitulate briefly, in this section we examined a few examples of early British thinking about the Sikhs in order to discover the ways in which one’s vested interest and unconscious presuppositions shape (and often warp) one’s understanding and interpretations. Our underlying assumption was that we would be in a better position to analyze the subtle distorting influence in contemporary scholarship if we first examined the more obvious distorting influences at work in earlier scholarship. The processes and devices of discourse that we uncovered bear summary repetition because, if our assumption is correct, we should find similar factors at work in more recent scholarship.



(1) The most obvious, and probably the least available, form of distortion is introduced by focussing on only one aspect of any given phenomenon (e.g., Prinsep's narrow focus on Sikh military--political history).

(2) More subtle forms of distortion are caused by unconscious projections, either (A) ascribing to the other one's own thoughts and motivations (as we saw with Prinsep's projection of political motives) or (B) perceiving the other as being precisely the opposite of oneself.

(3) Finally, we noted how certain items of discourse—certain habitual ways of analyzing an issue, and especially certain key terms (such as martial race and civilized/savage)—could acquire the status of neutral descriptions, and even be accepted as such by all involved parties, while actually embodying a particular ideology and a set of implicit value judgements.

#### *Sikh Syncretism.*

If one examines survey books (especially textbooks) on world religions and/or general works on Asian religion, one almost invariably finds that Sikhism, if mentioned at all, is usually presented as “a hybrid of two old religions, Islam and Hinduism.”<sup>17</sup> There are, however, some curious variations on the syncretism theme. One finds, for example, that some authors assert that Nanak “stands in a closer relation to Hinduism”<sup>18</sup>. while other authors assert that Nanak “leaned rather more to Islam than to Hinduism.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in opposition to writers who explain Sikhism as being “an offshoot of Hinduism”,<sup>20</sup> one can discover writers who assert that in Sikhism “there is little doubt that the Muslim source predominates”.<sup>21</sup> Still other authors emphasize that Sikhism, because of its syncretic character, “is not in any absolute sense new”,<sup>22</sup> an opinion not shared by scholars who stress the originality of Guru Nanak”<sup>23</sup> over Sikhism's supposed syncretism. And it would probably be possible to find many other such examples of disagreement. Thus Hindu/Muslim syncretism, which many writers on religion appear to regard as an axiomatic and “obvious” category for beginning any analysis of the Sikh religion, turns out to be extremely ambiguous. This peculiar state of affairs leads us to ask deeper kinds of questions about Sikh syncretism, such as, why has this question attracted so much attention? and, what ultimately, is at stake in this issue?

The answers to these questions are not simple because, as it turns out, several different factors came into play here. The

preeminence of syncretism interpretation is due partially to the work of certain Sikh scholars who hold to the idea for various reasons, such as the desire to demonstrate Sikhism's inherent ecumenism- a noble ideal, undoubtedly, but many of the results of this portrayal have been unfortunate. One finds, for example, that many of the authors of general surveys who rely on this characterization tended to "dismiss Sikhism as syncretism, or avoid it altogether"<sup>24</sup> or, when they do deal with it in a positive manner, overemphasize its syncretic character "due to the attractiveness of the syncretistic religion in a text-book on the great world religions."<sup>25</sup>

The principal objection to the appellation "syncretism," however, is that within Western religions the term was traditionally used to denounce sub-groups within the religious community who were perceived as having defiled the original revelation by "grafting on foreign elements."<sup>26</sup> In this light, it is not unreasonable to guess that this label was probably originally applied to the Sikhs by British administrators or missionaries who wished thereby to convey the judgement that Sikhism was spurious.

To the counter-objection that in contemporary usage the term has lost its pejorative connotations, the reply should be to ask, why, then are the principal Western religions never labelled "Syncretistic"? In other words, there is nothing intrinsically objectionable in the assertion that one can find both Hindu and Islamic influences in Sikhism, as long as one acknowledges the same state of affairs in other religions. Islam for example, was shaped by Judaism, Christianity, and ancient (pre-Islamic) Arabian religion. Christianity, contains elements of Judaism, Mithraism, Hellenistic religions, and who knows what all else. Surely all of the great world faiths have been at least partially influenced by their encounter with other religions<sup>27</sup>, In what way, then is Sikhism, and not other faiths, a "Syncretism"? Or, to ask the same question in a different way, if Islam and Christianity are not "syncretisms", then what other term would be appropriate to describe the peculiar blend of influences at work in these religions that would be inappropriate in the case of Sikhism? The answer, it seems to me, is that any criterion for distinguishing Sikhism from other religions in this regard would have to be purely arbitrary.

The implied judgement—and here we get in the crux of the evaluative freight being carried by this apparently neutral,

descriptive term— is that Sikhism can be understood as being roughly equivalent to the sum of its parts, whereas other faiths are somehow more than the sum of their parts. Or to state this more boldly, the founders of other religions were able to supply an extra (revealed? creative?) element to their final product that Guru Nanak somehow lacked. The distinction at work here is structurally similar to the civilized/savage contrast; i.e. “our” religion is revealed whereas “their” religion is a mere syncretism.

This is, of course, overstating the point, but it needs to be made perfectly clear that—with all due regard for the good intentions of present-day scholars—Sikh “Syncretism” is a holdover from an earlier period of scholarship when the various world religions were compared with Christianity in order to demonstrate Christianity’s intrinsic superiority. And the simple fact that we continue to use the term differentially (to describe Sikhism but not other religions) indicates that this judgement continues, albeit unconsciously, to be carried in our discourse.

#### *Neo-Sikhism*

Another term which one sometimes runs across in Western Sikh Scholarship is “neo-Sikhism”—a peculiar label which the British apparently devised for the purpose of describing the Singh Sabha reform movement. Although the term itself is used infrequently (particularly when compared with the omnipresent usage of “syncretism”), the attitude, or set of attitudes and judgements, embodied in the term are widespread enough to make an analysis of it worthwhile. Our way of proceeding will be to ask essentially the same types of questions about “neo” Sikhism that we asked about Sikh “Syncretism”.

Neo-Sikhism purports to describe a distinction between pre-Singh Sabha Sikhism and post-Singh Sabha Sikhism. Like Sikh syncretism, neo-Sikh appears to be a neutral, value-free term. If we look back at its earlier usage, however, we find, that one of the contrasting terms to “neo-Sikh” was “orthodox Sikh”.<sup>28</sup> i.e., by implication neo—Sikhs were heterodox whereas the older Sikhism was “true” or “real” carries these judgemental connotations, we can ask, as we did with syncretism, why the “neo” label is applied unevenly across world faiths. In other words why, in the wake of Luther’s reformation, do we not call Protestants “neo-Christians”? or why are post-vatican II Catholics not labelled “neo-Catholics” (The only area in Christianity that comes to mind as a place where “neo” is employed is when it is used to designate certain schools of

theology; e.g., neo-Orthodoxy and neo-Thomism.) Neo” gets applied to religious communities only when Westerners are describing other people’s religions—e.g., neo- Taoism, neo-Confucianism, neo-Hinduism, etcetera— and, more often than not, the label carries the sense that “neo” religions are deviations from their true, pristine forms. There are at least two possible perspectives from which to understand why this term is attached only to “non-Western” religions.

First, the earlier Protestant assumption was that the Reformation had returned Protestants to pristine Christianity. This presupposition in turn blinded them to the revision that their own tradition had experienced, but did not prevent them from passing judgement on the changes which had taken place in other religious traditions. This structure is similar to the pattern we saw operating in our examination of syncretism; i.e., one caricatures a process which one sees in other religions while repressing awareness of the fact that the same process has occurred within one’s own religion.

Second, in later periods the West conceived itself as being different from the rest of the World by virtue of (among other things) its essentially dynamic, progressive, changing character.<sup>29</sup> By implication, other cultures were static, unchanging, or even stagnant (another example of the West projecting an inverted self-image into the rest of the world). This structure influenced the West’s perception of “non-Western” religions in a peculiar fashion: Change was natural for Western religion (Christianity) but somehow unnatural when found in other faiths. Christianity is thus able to adapt to the modern world without losing its essence, but, as for a religion like that of Sikhs “much of their distinctiveness would vanish if a community like the Sikhs were to become modern in religion and social practice; and the cement that binds the community would disappear as well.”<sup>30</sup> From this slanted perspective, Sikhs who do adapt enough to succeed in the modern world have *ipso facto* betrayed their faith: “Whereas for Nanak, the ultimate matter was devotion to the True Name, for the present community:, Self-preservation appears to be somewhat more important.”<sup>31</sup> These last couple of statements, although they do not make use of the term “neo-Sikhism”, indicate that the same kind of attitude is present—an attitude which employs (though not consciously) one set of criteria for evaluating Western religions and another set of criteria for evaluating others. All religious

communities attempt to remain faithful to the essence of their tradition while adapting to changing conditions, and such accommodation does not axiomatically imply either the end of community or the substitution of practical concerns for religious devotion. Here once again, beneath apparently descriptive discourse, we find a value-judgement which reveals itself as such when contrasted with the treatment of other (particularly Western) religions. .

*Early Pacifism Vs. Later Militancy*

The final item of discourse that I want to pull out for a comparison/contrast type of analysis is not, as with syncretism or neo-Sikhism, a single term which embodies a covert judgement, but rather a standard observation which—when made by Western academics—is often stated in an overtly judgemental manner. The observation I refer to is the contrast between the “pacifism” of Nanak and the militancy of Gobind Singh. To extract a few items at random from world religion textbooks:

The Sikhs found themselves forced to abandon the non-violent teaching of the early masters...<sup>32</sup>

One of the paradoxes of the Sikh religion is its pacifism in theory and militarism in practice: .<sup>33</sup>

Sikhism’s transformation from a passive sect to a fighting theocracy is a well nigh complete reversal of basic values.<sup>34</sup>

More than the pejorative judgements that we examined earlier, one is tempted to dispute these remarks at a direct, factual level (e.g. Guru Nanak’s attitude was no more “passive<sup>35</sup> than Guru Gobind Singh’s was “violent”). Let us, however, sidestep this temptation and take the same type of approach utilized in previous sections. In this instance, the appropriate question to raise is, Are there other world religions in which the founder preached a (atleast apparently) pacifist ethic which later followers disregarded?

Out of the faiths that come immediately to mind, Jainism probably has the best record, and Buddhism’s record is uneven. However, undoubtedly the religion with the worst record of violence is Christianity. If one were to take the words “Christians”, “Christian”, and Christianity’s” and substitute them for “Sikhs”, “Sikh”, and Sikhism’s” in the above statements, the statements would be at least as accurate, and probably a good deal more accurate, than the originals.

To the extent that an author is Christian, or at least from a

Christian background, it might be possible to postulate that a kind of “guilt projection” is at work here. In other words, if one is uncomfortable with the tension/ contradiction between theory and practice in the Christian religion but refuses to face the issue squarely (and thus partially represses it), then one is likely to project that contradiction onto other religious traditions —whether or not such a tension actually exists in the other traditions. Thus the discomfort which is felt about Christianity’s self-contradiction gets displaced onto an object which had nothing to do with the original problem.

The point here is not to criticize Christianity, but rather to once again point out the differential treatment which the Sikh religion has received at the hands of Western scholars; i.e., these kinds of evaluative remarks would have been less objectionable had similar criticisms been levelled against the other world faiths. The only difference between this example and the examples in the preceding sections is that here the biases are more explicit, and thus should, one would think, not have escaped the notice of conscientious academics.

The line of approach taken in this paper was basically very simple. Our principal methodological tool was comparison/ contrast. What we did was to focus on particular terms or statements, and then ask why these items of discourse were appropriate for describing Sikhism, but not appropriate when applied to Western religions. For each item we argued that, because there was no criterion for such differential usage, the deployment of such discourse signalled the presence of covert value-judgements, and in each section we attempted to articulate precisely what these judgements were.

#### REFERENCES

1. John CB. Webstar, “Sikh Studies in the Punjab,” in Mark Juregensmeyer & N. Gerald Barrier, *Sikh Studies* (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1979, p32).
2. E.g., *refer* to the Second major section of Hans-Georg Gadmer’s *Truth and Method* (New York): Crossroad, 1975).
3. E.g. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970).
4. E.g., the work of Michel Foucault, as in *The Archaeology of knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

5. The approach taken in this paper has been decisively shaped by Charles Long's analysis of Western scholarship; e.g., *refer to*: Charles H. Long, "Human Centres: An Essay on Method in the History of Religions," *Scoundings* 61(3), 1977, pp.400-414.
6. AC Arora, "Ern est Trumpp", in Fauja Singh, ed., *Historians and Historio-graphy of the Sikhs* (New Delhi: Oriental Publishers & Distributors,1978), p.155.
7. Ernest Trumpp, *The Adi Granth* (London: Allen & Co., 1877) p. cxxii.
8. Major James Browne, *History of the Origin and Progress of the Sikhs* in Ganda Singh ed. *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs* (Calcutta: Indian Studies Past and Present, 1962; 1st Pub. 1788), pp.13-14.
9. N.G. Barrier, : "Trumpp and Maculiffe: Western Students of Sikh History and Religion," in Fauja Singh, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 166-167.
10. Henry T. Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in Punjab* (Patiala: Languages Department, Punjab, 1970; 1st Pub. 1834).
11. Gianeshwar Khurana, *British Historiography on the Sikh Power in Punjab* (New Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore, Hyderabad & Ahmedabad: Allied, 1985), p.41.
12. Sir George MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co, 1933). p.2.
13. Hakam Singh, *Sikh Studies: A Classified Bibliography of Printed Books in English* (Patiala: Punjab Pub. House, 1982) p. 12.
14. T.A Heatcote, *The Indian Army* (New Yourk: Hippocrene, 1974) p.93.
15. John Ma1colm, "Sketch of the Sikhs" in M. Macauliffe, H.H.Wilson, Frederic Pincott, John Malcom & Sardar Kahan Singh. *The Sikh Religion: A symposium* (Calcutta: Sushil Gupta, 1958; 1st Pu'b.1810), p. 85
16. E.G., Edward. W. Said, *Orientalism* (New Your: Vintage, 1979), Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology* (Ithaca: Cornell U.Pr.1985), and Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The While Man's Indian* (New York: Vintage, 1979).
17. John A Hardon, *Religions of the World* (Westminister, MD; Newman, 1963), p.224,
18. D.S.Sarma, "The Nature and History of Hinduism," in Kenneth We. Morgan, ed., *The Religion of the Hindus* (New York: Ronald, 1933), p.4l.
19. Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), p. 150.
20. Niels C Nielsen, Jr., Norvin Hein, Frank E. Reynolds, Alan L. Miller, Samuel E. Kariff, Alice C Cochran & Paul Mclean, *Religions of the World* (New York : St. Martin's, 1983), p. 383.
21. John A Hutchison, *Paths of Faith* (New Youk, St. Louis, San Francisco, Toronto, London, & Sydney:McGraw-Hill, 1969), p.200.
22. John, B Noss & David S. Nose, *Man's Religions* (New Youk: Macmillan, 1984),.221.
23. W.H. McLeod, "Sikhism," In Geoffrey Parrinder, ed., *Man and His Gods* (London, New York, Sydney, & Toronto: Hamlyn, 1971) p.212.
24. Mark Juergensmeyer, "The Forgotten Tradition: Sikhism in the study of World

- Religions,'in Juergensmeyer & Barrier. Op.cit., p.16.
25. Ibid., p.15.
  26. Paul B. Courtright, "Syncretism and the Formation of the Sikh Tradition," in Harbans Singh & N.Gerald Barrier, eds., Punjab Past and Present: Essays in Honour of Dr.Ganda Singh (Patiala, Punjabi V., 1976), p.417.
  27. "All the living religions are complex cultural developments in which can be traced the blending of preexisting religious forms." Herbert Stroup, *Founders of living Religions* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), p. 81.
  28. N. Gerald Barrier, *The Sikhs and Their Literature* (Delhi: Manohar, 1970) pp.xiiv-xiiv.
  29. As has been pointed out in a number of recent studies; e.g., Said, Op. Cit., Berkhofer, Op.Cit., & Johannes Febian, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia U. Pr., 1983).
  30. Eugene F. Irschick, "Sikh ism as a Category for Study,"in Juergensmeyer & Barrier. Op.cit., p. 53.
  31. Robert D.Baird & Alfred Bloom, *Indian and Far Eastern Religious Traditions* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1972). p.105.
  32. Smart, Op.Cit., p.152.
  33. Hardon, Op.cil., p.231
  34. Hutchison, Op.cit., p. 201.
  35. "The Guru, though a man of peace, was not a pacifist "John Ferguson, *War and Peace in the World's Religions* (New York, Oxford University Pr., 1978. P. 139,



## 19

## SIKHS IN AMERICA: STRESS AND SURVIVAL

RANBIR SINGH SANDHU

*INTRODUCTION*

Survival of a community consists of its continued ability to make a free public expression of its identity. For a small minority the fear that an affirmation of identity might invite hostility, in word deed or attitude, from a relatively homogeneous and dominant majority, is the primary cause of stress. The prospects for survival depend upon numerical strength, existence of areas of minority concentration, and the will to survive. Creation of subsystems to promote survival is a function of the economic strength, the educational level and the organizational skills of the minority group.

The Sikh identity is proclaimed by the five k's, viz., "Kes" (unshorn hair), "Kangha" (a comb in the hair), "Kachh" (a special type of shorts), "Kara" (a steel bangle), and "Kirpaan" (a sword), every Sikh is required to have. Over their unshorn hair, Sikh men wear a turban. A Sikh man with his beard and turban stands out in a crowd. This high visibility makes the Sikhs a special minority.

The Sikh presence in America is relatively new and the composition of this community has changed considerably over the years. After a slow growth primarily through immigration, the size of the community has increased rapidly since the middle 1960's. The attitudes of the host society have also changed. Early immigrants (upto the second World War) faced a hostile host society. Later immigrants (after the second World War) constituted a highly educated group of professionals who arrived in the United States at a time when the world was "shrinking" and cultural diversity was finding increased acceptance in the host society. They were, therefore, able to break some barriers to economic and social success and, to a certain extent, influence the host community opinions regarding themselves and immigrants in general.

They were able to ensure good education for their children and also set up mechanisms for elementary religious education. Recent immigration, of relatives of the previous immigrants, has been spurred by events in Punjab. Sikh young men, particularly those from Punjab villages, are “getting out” not only for economic reasons but also to escape arbitrary arrest, torture and possible death. This group, representative of the average village population in Punjab, includes a large proportion of non-professionals. However, their influx has contributed to growth in numbers and to the emergence of strong local communities centered around numerous Gurdwaras. In addition to immigrants, some Americans of European and African ancestry have converted to Sikhism giving the community a multi-racial character. The American converts have been quite assertive and have actively sought official recognition of the Sikh lifestyle.

In this paper we look at the nature and level of stress of being a Sikh in America and discuss the survival of the Sikh religion in America. We attempt to separate cultural survival from the religious. Inter-community as well as intra-community stresses are discussed. Survival mechanisms devised by the community are surveyed along with a look at the future.

### *SIKHS IN AMERICA*

#### *a. Classification*

The Sikh minority in America has changed in respect of numbers, level of education, and strength of the bond with the parent country, Punjab, and its language and culture. In a chronological classification, we can identify four groups, viz., the early immigrants and their offspring; the primary immigrants of 1960 to 1984 and the American converts along with their children; and recent immigrants. These groups represent different educational and economic levels, different periods in time reflecting different host attitudes, different types of stress faced, and different means of survival adopted by individuals and the community with varying degree of success. We could also classify the minority experience in another way into two categories; immigrants and American converts to the Sikh faith in one group and their children in the other. The immigrants and the converts comprise people who chose to be in a situation of stress and were prepared for the consequences of being “different” and, in the case of American converts, for the criticism and hostility of family and friends. Their children, on the other hand, are placed in a stressful situation

involuntarily, have the responsibility of ensuring the survival of the community, and are in greater need for support mechanisms. Survival as a community is entirely dependent on the extent to which the new generation is interested in and successful at defining and preserving its distinct heritage.

*b. Sikh Immigration to America.*

Sikh immigration to North America started around the turn of the century. However, restrictions were quickly placed on further immigration. Dusenbury states: "By the late 1940's, Canada had fewer than two thousand Sikh residents, mostly Jats labouring in the wood industries of British Columbia. At the same time, there were fewer than 1500 South Asians in the United States, most of whom were Jat Sikhs working as agriculturists in rural areas of California."<sup>1</sup> The early Sikh immigrants had to face legal, social, economic and even physical barriers to material success. Unable to bring their families from Punjab, or arrange for marriage to Punjabi women, they could not pass on their attachment to Punjab culture and the Sikh religion to the next generation. Most of them wished to, and many did, go back to Punjab to spend the later part of their life in surroundings they had fond memories of and a social environment in which they were respected. The roots of the community were shallow. In 1968, Chakravarti concluded: "Sikh community in El Centro is "dying" in cultural sense since the hold of its ethnic subsystem is slipping from the second generation."<sup>2</sup>

"The end of the second World War saw a lowering of barriers to Asian immigration to America. At the same time, India won freedom from British rule and was in desperate need of technical know how for economic and industrial development. This was procured not only by hiring foreign specialists but, more significantly, by sending selected Indian scientists and engineers to Europe and America for training, by expanding facilities for higher education within India, and using these scientists trained abroad as teachers, to generate qualified manpower in the long term. Many scientists and engineers were sent by the Central and State Governments in India, some under United Nations auspices, for advanced study at American universities. Others came on their own. They all carried back stories which triggered a strong "pull" for the newly emerging class of educated young. Jawahar Lal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, gave the highest priority to education and in only a few years after independence, India was producing more professionals than it could provide satisfying

employment *for*. The shortage *of* the early 1950's had turned *to* a surplus by the middle 1960's. *For* example, Punjab graduated less than 30 engineers in 1948 *from* a refugee college located in Roorkee (in the neighboring state *of* Uttar Pradesh). By 1965 there were *four* engineering colleges in the state admitting over a thousand students a year. Almost guaranteed employment, quick promotions, and heavy responsibilities *for* large projects that excited the imagination and tested the talents *of* engineers and scientists recruited soon after freedom were replaced by uncertainty and frustration *for* graduates *of* two decades later. India's industrial development and the accompanying growth *of* employment opportunities had lagged behind growth in education. The coincidental fact *of* liberalization of immigrant laws in the United States and Canada in the 1960's resulted in a large number *of* Sikh professionals coming over as immigrants. According *to* Nasser-Bush, 86 percent *of* Sikhs in a sample taken in 1972 had entered Canada in the *four* years since the 1967 Act. *Of* these, 84 percent indicated economic betterment as a motive *of* immigration. A better social environment *for* children *to* grow in was a reason indicated by all.<sup>3</sup>

Recent Sikh immigration has largely been *of* dependents and relatives *of* the primary immigrants of earlier periods. The "push" created by large scale suppression *of* the Sikhs in Punjab since 1984 has contributed *to* the influx *of* young men who wish *to* get out *of* Punjab regardless *of* what the future may hold *for* them. They have depended upon the hospitality and assistance *of* relatives and friends in "settling down." True *to* the Sikh tradition, *most of* them quickly become self-supporting. The new immigrants own and drive taxis, work at and own gas stations, and work in factories and industrial establishments. Many have started businesses catering *to* the special needs *of* the growing community.

#### *C. Sikhs Are a Special Minority.*

A minority may be a group whose members profess the same faith, have the same national origin, share an ethnic background, *or* belong *to* the same race different from that *of* the majority *of* the population. Many minority groups share *more* than one *of* these distinguishing features. Mexican, Italian, Irish, Polish, German communities in America consist *of* members with common ethnicity and national origin. Hindus have distinct religion and national origin. The black minority is racially distinct but in religion and culture has become quite *close to* the majority. The

East Asian and Southeast Asian minorities are racially and culturally distinct. The Sikhs in America, at the present time, are primarily identified by congregational prayer in the Gurdwara and the external symbols of the Sikh faith. In addition, because a large majority consists of first generation immigrants, they are attached to Punjabi language, dress, and diet, and generally practice endogamy. Most regard Punjab as the "homeland". Being different in so many ways, and sharing some of these distinguishing characteristics with other minority groups, create special problems for the Sikhs. The host society, in line with typical stereotyping trends, would like to bracket all dark-skinned people, including Sikhs, into a single unit. Yet, the distinctive beard and turban set the Sikh apart and often make him a special target for discrimination and mistrust. In discussing survival of Sikhs we must consider the cultural, regional and racial factors separately from the religious. Sikhs share their Punjab culture and ethnicity with other people from that region and racial distinction loses its importance when we include American Sikh converts in the Sikh religious community.

*IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA- Adaptation and Assimilation*

Caucasian immigrants socially assimilate into the host community usually within a generation. Their communities are relatively large and non-visible i.e, not identifiable at sight. Their chief survival interest is in maintaining a link with the parent country's language and culture which, in general, is not difficult if the parent country is a free nation. The immigrants, and their children after them, can continue to define their cultural identity simply by reference to the "homeland." In some cases, the national origin may also define a church affiliation. In these cases, the religious and the ethnic identities reinforce each other improving the chances of survival. South Asian and other non-white immigrants, the "visible" minorities, fall into two groups. Some assiduously seek assimilation and eventually acquire the culture, habits and even the prejudices of the host community giving up their native language, dress, and diet as well as the observance of religious customs. Most of those who were non-Christians at the time of their immigration do not adopt Christianity as their new religion, but essentially become non-religious. However, because the host community continues to regard all persons of one skin color as a single distinct minority group, this group finds social assimilation to be elusive. Other South-Asians are willing to

“accommodate, adjust and adapt in respect of dress, diet and language and even acculturate but retain their links to the parent country and religion and attempt to pass these on to the next generation through the establishment of ethnic and religious subsystems. Many ethnic subsystems take the form of population concentrations.

#### *STRESSES FACED BY SIKHS IN AMERICA*

##### *a. Interaction with the Host Community.*

Stress for a member of the minority community arises primarily from feeling of being treated as an outsider by the majority community. On occasions the majority has acted deliberately to exclude the immigrant and even the following generations from the mainstream. Active hostility against “Asians” and “Hindus” forced the early Sikh immigrants into low-paying jobs confining them, with some notable exceptions, to the lowest economic groups in society. They were not allowed to bring their spouses from Punjab and if they married an American citizen, she would lose her citizenship by such marriage. They had been declared ineligible to acquire citizenship and land laws provided that aliens ineligible for citizenship could not buy, own, or lease agricultural land. Many married catholic Mexican women and their children grew up as catholics. Social interaction with the host community was limited by language. As far as the host society was concerned the only distinction they retained was the involuntary one of skin color they shared with all South-Asians. The host society treated them as members of this larger minority.

Later, highly educated immigrants too had to face difficulties in finding employment, accommodation, professional advancement and education of their children in spite of the existence of anti-discrimination laws and absence of restrictions on acquiring property. A common question at job interviews has been : “Are you prepared to adopt the American dress?” The real question is: “Are you willing to cut your hair?” Sikh employees who became citizens are asked by their supervisors and colleagues if they plan to cut their hair. Discouraged in their quest for suitable employment in their fields of specialization or having had unpleasant experience on the job with respect to advancement and recognition, many highly qualified Sikh engineers and scientists have found alternative careers in owner-operated businesses. There are cases of Sikhs with Master’s degrees unable to find any employment primarily because of the reluctance of the employers

in hiring “different looking guys.” In looking for housing, this writer was once told by a landlady: “we do not rent apartments to people with whiskers.” In 1978 an American Sikh citizen, accompanying his wife at her naturalization was ordered by the U.S. District Judge to remove his turban or leave the court.<sup>4</sup> In 1982 an American Sikh was told by his employer to comply: with a new safety policy that directed men to be clean-shaven.<sup>5</sup> In 1984, a Deputy Registrar in Ohio refused to renew the driving license because the American Sikh would not agree to have his picture taken without his turban.<sup>6</sup> As recently as 1990, a Sikh child in Ohio was told that he could not play basketball in his middle school because of a rule forbidding headgear during play. There have been numerous such incidents. Dress codes for employees, membership of an association, laws requiring helmets other safety headgear, etc. have continued to create stressful situations for Sikhs. The immigrant or the convert Sikh understands the situation and may either succumb and cut his hair or insist on his right to practice his faith and fight, some times successfully, to get the rules’ changed. However, Sikh children do not understand why people would not let them be Sikhs and find such confrontations extremely troublesome. Sikhs working as physicians, engineers, scientists and the like led relatively sheltered lives with most of their interaction with the host society limited to educated and well-to-do Americans. However, occasionally they too had to run into other segments of the host population and their experience was far from pleasant. A surgeon working as a resident at a midwestern hospital would go to work before sunrise to avoid comments about his turban. Recent immigrants who drive taxis, work in factories, or run small businesses, have to constantly live with all levels of racial, ethnic and religious prejudices. Stories of attacks by hoodlums on Asian and particularly Sikh workers are common. During the Iran hostage crisis, many less educated Americans would take turbaned

Sikhs to be Iranian followers of Ayatollah Khomeini. There were several incidents of violence against Sikhs.

The host society has changed since the days of the early immigrants. A large majority of people are enlightened enough to accept equality as a matter of principle. In each of the cases mentioned in an earlier paragraph, the problem was resolved. The judge responded to the press coverage of the incident by inviting the person concerned to his chambers and apologizing. The Ohio

Bureau of Motor Vehicles was contacted by the State Representative for the area and the Deputy Registrar was duly instructed to accommodate the religious beliefs of citizens. However, the feelings of discouragement, harassment and having to fight to be accepted take their toll. A turbaned Sikh is still an unusual figure and children will ask: "Are you a genie?" People are asked by perhaps well-meaning strangers, "Do you plan to go back to your own country?" Being asked this question after having been in the United States as a naturalized citizen for over 20 years is disconcerting. However, it is even more stressful for Sikh children when they, born in America or brought here at a very young age by their parents and not knowing any other country as theirs, are asked the same question. It can only confuse them and make them feel rejected by the host community.

*b. Stresses Within the Sikh Community.*

A basic dilemma for Sikhs in America is whether they would like to be recognized as a distinct religious community in the general population or as a religious subsect within the larger group of Asian-Indians in America. In the former case, they would have to retain the five K's which distinguish them as Sikhs regardless of their national origin and skin color. There are intra-community stresses between people who have discarded or are willing to discard the external symbols of their faith and still like to be considered Sikhs and those who are opposed to this form of accommodation as being a repudiation of Sikh identity. The conflict is due to different beliefs as well as the desire for, and contrary to it the fear of, absorption in the larger Indian or South-Asian community with progressive loss of religious identity.

Persons who were originally Sikhs and chose to discard the principal outward symbol of their religion, the unshorn hair along with some of the other K's, can be placed in three groups. The classification is not exclusive and the same person might belong to one group at one stage in his life and switch to another later on. The first group consists of those who give up their religious beliefs altogether and essentially merge into the larger minority of South-Asian immigrants. This merger involves losing their identity as a Sikh. They do not maintain a connection with the rest of the community and indeed do not interact with it except on occasions when the community participates in the larger ethnic or regional festivals of the South-Asian minority. The second group consists of those who succumb to pressures of obtaining a



livelihood or advancement at work and pass the blame on to the host society as being intolerant. These include some of the earlier immigrants who felt coerced into cutting their hair in order to secure employment, lived with a feeling of guilt, and switched back in their old age or when they went back to India. Some who were not able to do so wished that at death their bodies be cremated. Their relatives would tie a turban around the head if the deceased happened to be a male. The Sikh prayer would be said at the occasion. These persons would generally insist on the “Bhai” (caretaker) in the Gurdwara being a “Kesdhari” (one who does not cut his hair) Sikh. They accept their inability to cope with the pressure to conform as a weakness and respect the Sikh tradition and those who are able to adhere to it in spite of the stressful situation they are placed in. The third group do not believe “Amrit” ceremony (formal initiation as a Sikh by taking “Khande da Pahul”) is necessary and dispute the necessity of keeping hair. They insist that the distinguishing Sikh symbols (the five K’s) are anachronistic and that the faith does not require them. They are convinced that the majority community is racist and insist that a Sikh, whether a newcomer or a child of Sikh immigrants, will not be able to find employment or be accepted by the host society until he cuts his hair. They will make fun of a newcomer or even coerce him to make him succumb. Some are aggressive to the point of, publicly ridiculing their own heritage. An “Amritdhari” Sikh immigrant was told by his clean-shaven brother that he would have to shave off before he would be allowed to venture out of the house. They believe that those who do not cut their hair are “brahmins” of the Sikhs. Recently, an older Sikh immigrant taunted a young Sikh scientist sporting a flowing beard and working under his supervision: “Are you working as a scientist in a laboratory or as a priest in a Gurdwara?” Some among this group profess strong belief in the Sikh religion, claim that they say the daily Sikh prayer and regularly read Siri Guru Granth Sahib at home. They take active interest in the Gurdwara, insist on their eligibility to officiate at religious ceremonies and to serve on Gurdwara management committees. They do not believe their religion to be separate from Hinduism and perceive themselves as tolerant and moderate. This group is often in conflict with the Sikhs who maintain their religious symbols in matters of representing Sikh interests, managing Sikh Gurdwaras, etc. One might say that this group is seeking to redefine the Sikh faith to fit their new appearance.

Even among Sikhs who maintain the religious symbols there are some who consider it important that a Sikh take “Khande da Pahul” and observe the “Rehat”, that prayer and preparedness regime prescribed for the Sikh. Others, sporting the five K’s do not go through the initiation but consider themselves to be religious moderates. Many of these moderates and those from the third group described previously point out that there are some among properly initiated Sikhs who do not observe the “Rehat”. These differences are among the major causes of continuing squabbles in most Gurdwaras and Sikh religious organizations.

The Sikh religion teaches equality of all people regardless of caste, religious belief, racial origin, and sex. However, in most Sikh congregations, the members have different socio-economic, educational and ethnic background. Some who consider themselves to be intellectually or financially elite are unable or unwilling to interact with those who are not. There are cases where the educated elite of the 1960’s built the Gurdwaras and now other, more recent immigrants, with less education, control them because of their numerical strength. The elite often resent this, stay away from the Gurdwaras, and gradually move away from the religious fold.

As the number of Gurdwaras has grown, a number of full-time caretakers (Bhais) have been hired to look after them and to provide leadership in religious ceremonies. The Sikh religion has no priests but many of these caretakers who have musical skills in singing verses from Siri Guru Granth Sahib have taken on and been granted the role of priests. Many Sikhs are impatient with this induction of priesthood into the faith and would like to do away with the practice.

The religious services in various Gurdwaras do not follow any uniform pattern. Some Sikhs insist that the proceedings in the Gurdwaras should follow the patterns established by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in Punjab but many of the “Bhais” follow whatever they learned from their own teachers. In some of the larger Gurdwaras, the “Bhais” are well-paid, have acquired wealth and property and, with little to do, tend to become idolent and have been known to interfere with the working of the religious subsystem in order to protect their turf.

Over the last several years, yet another intra-community stress has been due to the situation in Punjab, the Sikh homeland.

Sikhs are alarmed at the Indian Government's persecution of members of their faith. They are concerned about the rampant human rights violations, torture and extrajudicial killings of the Sikhs, and about the very survival of their faith in the country of its origin. They would like the situation in Punjab to be discussed openly in the Gurdwaras and for the Gurdwaras in America to assist the Punjab Sikhs in their struggle for survival. Many, convinced that the Indian Government is essentially a Hindu-dominated regime bent upon homogenization of the country by eliminating religious minorities, advocate the creation of Khalistan as an independent Sikh state. This goes against the wishes of the larger Indo-American community which is not sensitive to Indian Sikh concerns and, in line with communal propaganda, believes the Sikh emphasis on religious identity to be separatism and a threat to the unity of the country. Identity with the Sikh concern for survival as an independent religious community and sympathy for the Sikhs in Punjab is in conflict with the Indo-American identity. Those who value their Indian identity over their religious identity oppose any discussion of the Punjab situation in the Gurdwaras, and insist that the Gurdwara is a place purely for worship with no discussion of the socio-political problems facing the community.

In India, concurrently with the Government's persecution of mainstream Sikhism, many cults led by individuals claiming to be followers of Siri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's divine message have emerged. They do not accept Siri Guru Granth Sahib as Guru and/ or do not accept the authority of the traditional Sikh institutions like the Akal Takhat or the collective Sikh leadership represented by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in Punjab. They do not respect and observe the tradition of "Khande da Pahul." They have set up branches in American cities adding to the conflicts. Some groups maintain a facade of Sikh piety and the outward appearance of Sikhs, are active in the affairs of the Gurdwaras, profess allegiance to Siri Guru Granth Sahib and even administer "Pahul". However, they encourage and cultivate attachment to some individual "Sant" or "Teacher" which is against Sikh principles.

### *C. Sikh Children.*

Sikh children are involuntary victims of stress. They are placed in a situation which is not of their making and which they often are unable to comprehend. The feeling of isolation, rejection

and helplessness can play havoc with their self-esteem and personal well-being.

*i. Interaction with host society.*

A young Sikh child finds it extremely disconcerting that his peers at school find him strange and are unfriendly. Being stared at while walking down the street is awkward enough for anyone but specially so for a little child or an adolescent. Older children will often pull at the Sikh child's hair or play with it. Sikh boys are often asked: "What is that on your head?" This stressful situation often makes the Sikh child withdrawn, uncommunicative, and worried. Teachers not used to having identifiable minority students in their classes have on occasions interpreted this as evidence of a learning disability, further aggravating the problem. Some teachers advise Sikh parents to use English at home to accelerate the process of acculturation even though there is ample evidence that bilingual students are better learners. In fact, children of immigrant parents are known to be able to switch accent when talking to their parents or grandparents. Changing schools and "getting to know" a new set of peers all over again is a very trying experience for Sikh children. Young Sikh males find it extremely troublesome to be often the only students in their schools with a turban. They have to face official indifference to their concerns, social isolation and often hostility. They are not allowed to participate in certain sports. The teachers often are not sympathetic to a religious belief different from their own. Even when they excel academically, the "different" children are discouraged from representing their school or class. Many children as well as teachers have been known to refer to the lone Sikh child as "that Indian boy (girl)."

*ii. Stresses at home.*

For many children the most stressful situation is their elders' adherence to a "foreign" culture. Brought up in America, they do not have an understanding or appreciation of the culture their parents grew up with and are so attached to. They are culturally American, because of the school education and the interaction with their peers, but are racially Asian. The host society insists on regarding them as foreigners. They feel that they belong neither to America nor to their parents' country of origin. They can identify with neither and feel isolated and rejected. Unable to escape their racial identity, many children would like to reinforce it with knowledge of their heritage and pride in their ancestry. However,

the information they get about their religion is often contradictory. They wish to be able to proudly say where their parents or ancestors came from but there is no Sikh country anywhere in the world. Their “homeland” Punjab is part of India. It is difficult for them to identify with India as a whole and most Americans would not know where Punjab is. Many understand Punjabi when it is spoken at home and some have learnt to read it. Few know it well enough to read from Siri Guru Granth Sahib. Growing Sikh children are quite confused over the difficulty of finding marriage partners in the endogamous option preferred by their parents and of preserving their faith in an exogamous one for which greater choices might be available.

### *SURVIVAL*

Typical interaction between immigrants and the host community consists of need-based adaptation (for example, change to the dress habits and learning to speak the language of the host community at work), adjustment involving learning a new language, form of entertainment and diet (for example; discarding the native language for the language of the host at home, interest in American sports like football and baseball, eating beef, etc.) and acculturation. At the same time, the host society needing cheap labour, accommodates “foreign” employees when “natives” are not available to do certain jobs. In such situations, as the host society gets used to the presence of the foreigners, it develops a certain amount of tolerance, or reduction of resentment, towards them. In due course, as the “foreigners” prove themselves to be inoffensive and useful, the host society comes to accept the “different” persons and ceases being critical, hostile or coercive. As this process continues, the immigrant and the host eventually may reach a state of equilibrium based on coexistence with a certain level of acceptable and non-threatening expression of identity by the minority. If the immigrant group progresses to economic parity with the host, this equilibrium may include mutual socio-cultural enrichment. On the other hand, if the expression of identity by the minority is viewed as threatening the socio-cultural fabric or the political dominance of the majority, hostility against the minority may result.

In order to survive, that is, to have continued existence as a distinct group with an expressible identity, a minority has to create subsystems based on ethnicity, religion or national origin depending upon whichever of these is its distinguishing characteristic. For

the Sikh minority, this subsystem has to provide an organizational structure which can provide support to its members in overcoming stress and ensuring acceptance by the host society without the necessity of assimilation or total integration. It is especially important for survival that the present generation be able to pass on, to the following generations, a pride and a sense of purpose in the maintenance of a visible Sikh identity.

For the early Sikh immigrants, survival as Sikhs was extremely difficult. Their interaction with the “host” society followed the traditional model of helpless and desperate immigrants trying to adapt, adjust, accomodate and assimilate into the host society on the terms set by the latter. Driven by necessity, these people adopted the English language, took to western dress, and modified their diet. From the point of view of religious identity, the most significant act was to discard the external symbols of their religion to avoid hostility and win acceptance as employees. This was not merely a change of dress which would essentially be a cultural matter but deprivation of symbols of their faith. They were emotionally attached to Punjab, their homeland of which they had happier memories. Within their homes and in their interaction within the community, they were still Punjabis. They developed subsystems around Gurdwaras. However, the Gurdwaras, religious institutions by definition, were few and were primarily places of social intercourse where the immigrants could speak Punjabi and reminisce about their youth in the land of their origin. This affinity with Punjab was difficult to pass on to the next generation which did not share their parents’ nostalgia and had no practical use for the language of their elders.

These immigrants were, in general, not well educated. Chakravorti reported that over 75 percent of his sample of Sikh immigrants in El Centro had less than a high school education. They did not know their own religion, did not know how to do “keertan” (congregational singing of verses from Siri Guru Granth Sahib) and were unable to read from Siri Guru Granth Sahib. Only 3 (including the “Bhai” at the Gurdwara) out of 22 wore the turban. Knowing very little about their religion, the immigrant fathers were unable to get their children interested in it. For these immigrants, religion, national origin, language and culture were inextricably mixed. Thus, weakening of the cultural subsystem in the next generation also implied their dwindling interest in religion. They were unable to create facilities for educating the

children in the principles and the history of their faith. Exogamy also contributed to the children losing interest in the Gurdwara and the Sikh religion.

Their children were generally more 'educated than their parents but not well enough to move up from the lowest economic group. In spite of a high level of cultural assimilation, they continued, like their parents, to be victims of discrimination because of the color of their skin. Identity was a burden and not a matter of pride, particularly because they were identified not as visitors from another independent nation but fortune-seekers from a British colony. Their survival was essentially as part of the broader South-Asian community. Their background was apparent only to the other South-Asians. To the host community they had no separate identity.

Starting life in America as farm labourers, many of the early Sikh immigrants finally became landowners and successful farmers. In 1956, Dalip Singh Saund became the first Asian-born person to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Even though most of them were not well-read, they recognized the benefits of education. It is well-known that the farmers in Yuba City helped many students from Punjab by providing them summer employment. They contributed towards the education of numerous settlers of the 1960's and after and indirectly helped set up strong subsystems for survival in the long run.

Immigrants, coming in the 1960's and after, were quite different from the early immigrants in their level of education. Many had come to the United States and Canada to pursue advanced study and research at universities and after completing their studies decided to stay on. Many succeeded very well in various spheres of academic and professional endeavor and had the will to survive as a distinct religious community. They could communicate effectively with each other and with the host community. They designed and implemented several survival mechanisms. One, of course, was to establish more Gurdwaras to serve groups of people scattered all over America. This provided more frequent, generally once a week, contact with the other Sikhs in the area. Another was to create national organizations to promote better communication between Gurdwaras. This would also be the mechanism for holding periodic Sikh Conferences bringing increased visibility to the Sikh identity. The U.S. based Sikh Council of North America (SCNA) was formed in 1978 with

this objective as an association of Gurdwaras. Delegates from member Gurdwaras would meet annually at a Seminar and also use the occasion to elect new officials. The Federation of Sikh Societies was the Canadian counterpart of the SCNA. Mrs. Lillian Carter was the chief Guest at the first annual meeting of the Sikh Council held in Berkeley, California. The SCNA went into decline after the June 1984 invasion of Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) by the Indian army. The Council leadership, perhaps not fully aware of the situation in Punjab, had honoured Mrs. Indira Gandhi, during her visit to the United States of America in 1982, with a "Saropa." The Sikhs in America could not forget this. The World Sikh Organization (WSO) was set up in 1984. It had individual as well as institutional members. Individual members were organized into "chapters" for the purpose of sending delegates to the annual or special conferences. Several other groups, including organizations not connected with any Gurdwara, have also been set up from time to time to meet special needs of the community.

Several magazines and newsletters including, among others, "The Sikh Sansar" published quarterly by the Sikh Foundation of USA, "The American Sikh Review" published by the Sikh Cultural Society of New York, "The Sikh Samachar" published by the Guru Nanak Foundation of Washington, D.C., "The Sikh World" published by the International Sikh Youth Foundation in Detroit, Michigan, "The Spokesman Weekly" published from Toronto, Canada, "Sikh Thought" published by the Sikh Education and Research Centre in St. Louis, were started. Most had to fold up because of economic problems. Perhaps they were before their time. However, the World Sikh News which started publication in end of 1984 as a publication of the World Sikh Organization continues to operate as a privately owned newspaper. Several periodicals in Punjabi language were started and some of them are flourishing.

The most important development has been the introduction of one-week or two-week "camps" for Sikh children. Starting with a single such camp in the United States about fifteen years ago, currently hundreds of Sikh children are taught Punjabi, Sikh history, Keertan, and Sikh principles in numerous camps that run all summer. Most camps are designed for children below 18 years of age. However, in 1983 to 1985, camps and seminars for college-age Sikhs were also held. Regional and national Keertan competitions are now regularly organized. Scores of "Jathas"



(teams) of young Sikhs assemble at one place. The competition lasts several days. Sikh children are increasingly involved in doing “Keertan” in the Gurdwaras. There are many young Sikhs who have taken “Khande de Pahul”. A Khalsa school has been started in Vancouver where Sikh children can study free of many stresses. The Sikhs have supported the creation of programs of Sikh Studies at several Universities. Chairs of Sikh studies have already been set up at University of British Columbia and the University of Toronto. A Chair at university of Michigan is in the process of being filled. Research into Sikh concerns has attracted the interest of several Western scholars. Several Sikh Studies Conferences have been organized and supported by Sikhs. They have actively participated in conferences where their concerns may be discussed. Sikhs have increasingly participated in interfaith activities with the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation of Washington, D.C. taking a step in this direction. Sikh students have set up a worldwide computer net-work for communication among themselves. Recently, Punjabi fonts have been developed for use with various commercially available word processors.

#### *THE FUTURE*

It appears that, contrary to the outlook expressed by Chakravorti two decades ago, the Sikh community in the America has a reasonable chance of surviving as a distinct and visible religious entity instead of amalgamating into the larger racial group of South-Asians. There are two main reasons for this optimism. One is the acceptance of multiculturalism in America and the other is the ability of the Sikh minority to set up appropriate subsystems for its survival as a religious minority. Regarding a multicultural America, Bal notes: “Mainstream America consists of Americans who maintain the fundamentals of their ethnicity while making judicious adjustments to the environment in which they live. The adjustments are made in order to participate effectively and fully in the social, economic and political activities in America as law-abiding individuals with awareness of the Bill of Rights and the essentials of the American Constitution. In view of the present-day ethnic egalitarianism, supported by the laws of the land, mainstream America is defined neither in terms of the standards of the Anglo-saxon majority in America nor in terms of any other ethnic standards?” He goes on to assert: “To suggest a future of the American society when Americans will be an ethnically faceless people is contrary to human nature, contrary to the power of ethnic heritage over people and contrary to

the current trends in the American society.” America of the future promises to be a beautiful fabric of different but complementary hues and shades.

Considering the subsystems for survival, one has to keep in mind several factors that would contribute to preservation of Sikh identity. These include definition of identity, pride in being a Sikh, and knowledge and practice of the essentials of the faith without conflict with other beliefs and faiths.

If Sikhism is to survive as a world religion, it must claim its distinct existence solely upon religious belief and religious observance. Religious identity has to be separated from identity of language, culture, national origin or race. It has to be an identity of all Sikhs including not only immigrants from Punjab and their children, who have a skin color different from that of the majority community, but also the “Gora Sikhs” (Caucasian Sikhs) and “Black Sikhs”, present and future. Racial identity is shared with other groups from South Asia and is, therefore, not uniquely Sikh. Also, with persons of Caucasian as well as Afro-american origin embracing the Sikh faith, the racial identity becomes meaningless. With the younger generation exposed to contact with the host community and the latter becoming increasingly receptive to social diversity, endogamy is going to be difficult, if not impossible.

As stated earlier, the Sikh religious identity is proclaimed by the five K's -the most important being “kes” (unshorn hair).

People who want to do away with this distinction would be recognized only as South-Asians by the majority community and their recognition as believers in the principles of Sikhism would be limited to other people of South-Asian or specifically Indian origin. It is clear that they will eventually lose their religious identity and be submerged in the dominant religions practiced by the larger minority. In the long run, mainstream America will only recognize as Sikhs only those who are strict in their observance of the five k's. This would, of course, include the American Sikh converts.

For the Sikh immigrant, affinity for Punjabi language and culture is natural. However, regional language and culture is not an essential part of religion and is difficult to transmit to the following generations. For the younger generation, not so intimately acquainted with Punjab, it is a heavy burden to carry. Knowledge of Punjabi language is desirable for proper understanding of Siri Guru Granth Sahib but it should be possible to be a Sikh

without having to be a linguist.

Punjab is the historical “homeland” for the Sikh religion. Undoubtedly, future generations of American Sikhs will evolve an American Sikh identity but Punjab, because of its intimate association with Sikh history, will always be an emotional focus for Sikhs everywhere. As the place of the Gurus and the birth of the community, where the Sikhs form a majority of the population, whatever happens in Punjab will continue to deeply influence Sikhs all over the world. Events of 1984 and after have had a profound effect on the Sikhs in America. A strong Punjab in which independence of Sikh religion and culture is assured, appears necessary for the survival of the Sikh Faith. As stated by Khushwant Singh : “The only chance of survival of the Sikhs as a separate community is to create a State in which they form a compact group, where the teaching of Gurmukhi and the Sikh religion is compulsory and where there is an atmosphere of respect for the traditions of their forefathers.”<sup>8</sup> ,

Sikh religion is not merely a set of beliefs, it is even more importantly a way of life, that of a “Saint-soldier.” Sikhs must live their faith in addition to simply being visible as different, i.e., they must live their lives in prayer and humble service of the people. In interacting with the host society, they must participate in inter-faith activities on equal terms, practise the Sikh concern for fellow- beings, institute free kitchens, set up hospitals, and provide services to the elderly, the disabled, and the homeless in line with the traditions of their faith. They should fight for freedom and equality for all people and resist oppression wherever it may exist.

There is not only lack of information but actually a great deal of disinformation regarding Sikh religion. It is up to the Sikhs to correct this by making correct information available. The Sikhs in America need to set up a central religious organisation concerned with collection and dissemination of information, correction of erroneous propaganda, promotion of Sikh schools, education of Sikhs and about Sikhs, and with ensuring fair treatment for Sikhs and acceptance of their lifestyle. This could be an association of Gurdwaras along with appropriate arrangements for participation by individuals and by small communities not centered around a Gurdwara.

To provide support to the younger generation of Sikhs, more Gurdwaras along, with Sunday schools are needed as the immediate support system. The present subsystem of youth camps must be further strengthened. The different youth camps

must establish a central organization to coordinate their work including standardization of the texts and the curriculum. The Sikh youth trained at these camps must be increasingly involved in conducting the religious as well as socio-cultural affairs of the Gurdwaras and the community. Newspapers and magazines in English, dealing with Sikh history, religion, and socio-political issues, are needed. There is a considerable body of Sikh literature which is available only in Punjabi. Effective translations into modern English need to be given high priority. More Khalsa schools must be started, these being an important priority, and eventually Sikh colleges and universities established. Here, in addition to a liberal arts education, principles of Sikh faith will be taught. Such schools are presently viable in some areas of concentration of Sikh population. To serve a scattered population, residential schools ought to be set up. Parents of Sikh children must take greater interest in and participate more fully in parent-teacher associations of school parent groups. Their visibility at school functions and participation in school affairs will provide an increased measure of security to Sikh children. These are challenging tasks that need to be urgently addressed.

## REFERENCES

1. Verne A. Dusenbury, Introduction to *The Sikh Diaspora* South Asia Publications, Columbia Missouri 1989.
2. Chakravorti, Robindra Chandra, "The Sikhs of El Centro: A Study in Social Integration," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1968.
3. Nasser-Bush, Merun Hussain, "Differential Adjustments Between Two Indian Immigrant Communities in Toronto: Sikhs and Ismailies," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Colorado, 1973.
4. Columbus Dispatch, Columbus, Ohio, Vol. 108, No. 138, November 15, 1978, page 1.
5. San Francisco Examiner, San Francisco, California, August 13, 1982.
6. The Daily Gazette, Xenia, Ohio, Vol. 117, No. 92, March 7, 1984, page 1, and Dayton Daily News, March 9, 1984, page 23.
7. A.S. Bal, A Few Comments of Ethnic Identity, Presented at the 1984 Annual Meeting of the Sikh Council of North America.
8. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 1839-1974, Indian Edition, Oxford University Press, 1977.

## 20

IN THE COMPANY OF LIONS AND PRINCESSES: THE  
SIKH COMMUNITY IN THE CANADIAN MOSAIC.

JIM LOTZ

First, let me thank you for welcoming me to your community. I am an outsider in this community so that my perspectives on Sikhism are those of a newcomer. Since 1960 I have been involved in all aspects of community development in Canada, Britain and the United States.<sup>1</sup> I am not a newcomer in that field, and this paper attempts to indicate some of the limitations and possibilities that Sikhs, as members of a community, face in a rapidly changing North American society.

Over the past year I have focussed attention in my research on mediating structures in community and organizational development<sup>2</sup> Such bodies stand between individuals and the larger entities of society.

“There is more to our society than just government and individuals. There is a range of structures in between that are meaningful, legitimate, efficacious, dynamic, and,--under the rubric of what we might call the old politics--generally ignored.’<sup>3</sup>

Such structures offer a meeting place where past and future, theory and practise, insiders and outsiders, individual and community needs and agendas, the centre and the edges of society, top down and bottom up efforts in personal, organizational and community development can come together.

Mediating structures have a particular significance in Canada. A Canadian nationalist, writing of the “Canadian Dialectic”, states:

Canadian identity lives in a process of tension and argument, a conflict of opposites which often stalemate, often are forceq to submit to compromise, but which--so far in our historyu have not ended in final

resolution.’<sup>4</sup>

Mathews sees a tension between individualism and communitarianism, identifying the former with Americans and the latter with Canadians. He sees individualism as a threat to Canadian community values and institutions. In the United States, there is increased interest in community and commitment, as the work of Robert Bellah indicates.<sup>5</sup> In some cases this has led to the establishment of “lifestyle enclaves.”<sup>6</sup>

Bellah notes:

“Whereas a community attempts to be an inclusive whole, celebrating the interdependence of public and private life and of the different callings of all, lifestyle is fundamentally segmental and celebrates the narcissism of similarity. It usually explicitly involves a contrast with others who ‘do not share one’s lifestyle.’”<sup>7</sup>

My research has focused on how communities develop over time in ways that enable them to maintain their identity and integrity while adapting creatively to change beyond their boundaries. In recent years I have begun to look at religious communities the moral, ethical and spiritual basis of secular ones.<sup>8</sup> There is abundant evidence that only communities with strong, well-articulated religious and moral foundations can survive the tensions that beset everyone and every organization in times of change.<sup>9</sup>

And even some of these communities have been shaken to their roots in recent years. Hutterites in Canada, who pride themselves on their self-reliance and independence from the mainstream of society, invested heavily in the Principal Group in Alberta. This financial institution collapsed and investors have been reimbursed with public money.

The concept of community, of harmonious relationships between men and women, of an ideal, utopian state, has fascinated social scientists and activists for centuries.<sup>10</sup> It has surfaced recently in the Throne Speech of the new NOP government in Ontario.<sup>11</sup>

Community development, however, often arises from a crisis. In this century, community development began when the British colonial government could not find the money for a planned programme of mass education. Colonial government officials and local people pooled resources to solve their own problems in their own way.<sup>12</sup> This *ad hocery*, received the name of community development. Because British policy was directed

towards eventual independence for its colonies, community development was rationalised as a prelude to the creation of new nations after the war. And many of these nations invoked community development as a way of incorporating diverse peoples within their boundaries into the state.

India was “invented” by the British. Before they conquered the country, the sub-continent had an enormous range of cultures, political systems, and ways of life. On independence, the Indian government adopted the *panchayat raj* system of community development, with an indigenous official taking over the co-ordinating role of the former expatriate officials.

In Canada, community development cannot be seen outside the changing nature of the society. In 1965, John Porter’s book *The Vertical Mosaic* punctured one of the myths about Canada. Just as in the United States it has been shown that many individuals and groups have not “melted” and submerged their identities in the melting pot of a new society, so Porter’s work showed that Canada was not a mosaic of separate — but equal— groups. Some parts of the mosaic were more equal than others:

“Because the Canadian people are often referred to as a mosaic composed of different ethnic groups, the title, ‘The Vertical Mosaic’, was originally given to the chapter which examines the relationship between ethnicity and social class: As the study proceeded, however, the hierarchical relationship between Canada’s many cultural groups became a recurring theme in class and power...it became clear that the Canadians of British origin have retained, within the elite structure of society, the charter group status with which they started out...’,<sup>13</sup>

Porter Portrays Canada as a post-colonial society, with an elite group controlling access to money and power. Thus the first attempts at community development in Canada, which began in the 1960s, had an unconsciously paternalistic tinge to them. Certain “backward peoples”, including the Indians, the poor, Blacks and other dwellers on the margins of society, were seen as being in need of help. The goal of community development efforts was to integrate these people into the mainstream of society.

In the 1970s, as the middle class became more affluent and bureaucracies expanded, groups came into being to protect their special interests, to forward local agendas and to stop changes that threatened their communities.

In 1977, Robert Stanfield expressed concern about this trend:

“National life has become a struggle for advantage among large and powerful organizations--not simply trade unions and corporations. Organized pressure groups abound. „<sup>14</sup>

In the 1980s, as the existing system of generating jobs and wealth proved inadequate, increasing attention was paid to community economic development.<sup>-15</sup>

As the year 2/000 (Julian calendar) approaches there is increased interest in spiritually-based community development, especially in Britain and the- United States.

In the western world, with its emphasis on individualism and the tensions between individuals and communities, there is little understanding of how communities can relate to each other. The “Canadian dialectic” does not recognize the development of new communities in Canada, but sees individualism and communitarianism in constant tension. It does not recognize that, if Canada is a “community of communities” there may well be tensions between these communities unless government policy recognizes both their similarities and differences.

Many of the problems of Canada’s Indians stem from the fact that federal policy, legislation and programmes treat them as members of one homogenous group. The Canadian Indian is an abstraction created by a bureaucracy for the purposes of administration. There is no such being as a Canadian Indian. There are Cree, Ojibway, Kutchin, Blackfoot, Iroquois and many other tribes with distinct cultures. The Indians joke that it was as well that Christopher Columbus was not looking for Turkey, rather than India, for even the very name by which they are known is based on a mistake.

The federal government appears intent on following the same bureaucratic approach to handling the “multicultural question.”<sup>17</sup> Newcomers to Canada will be reduced to abstract categories. Sikhs will be lumped in with about 50 other groups as “East Indians.”

Thus it becomes increasingly important for the Sikh community in Canada to identify the similarities its members share with other newcomers to Canada, and to identify what differen-tiates it from them, and what their special contribution to personal, organizational, community and national development has been--and can be.

This means going beyond the cliches of racism - and a sense of injustice. It points up the need for a resurgence in Sikh studies



--and for a fresh perspective on the history of Sikhs, in India and wherever they have settled.

In the available material, Sikhs emerge as creative and innovative people. Hugh Johnston's recent book, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*<sup>18</sup> quotes Gurdit Singh, organizer of the voyage on its dedication page:

"Besides, the visions of men are widened by travel and contacts with citizens of a free country will infuse a spirit of independence and foster yearnings for freedom in the minds of the emasculated subjects of alien rule."

The *Komagata Maru* incident took place in the spring of 1914. It is presented as a shameful example of Canadian racism — which it is. But it is also a case study of an extremely creative and innovative individual who was opposed by an inflexible, uncaring, uninformed government. That kind of conflict goes right through Canadian history / despite the lip service paid by government to the need for innovation and entrepreneurship. Today, Gurdit Singh would be seen as someone with the qualities to create new jobs, instead of being viewed as an intruder bringing in people who would disrupt the Canadian mosaic. Gurdit Singh ended his days in honour — and poetry — in a festival to commemorate the martyrs of the *Komagata Maru*, dying 20 days later in his 95th year.

The first Sikhs came to Canada as a group to do the dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs that other Canadians scorned. In the post war years, Sikhs --and other immigrants --tended to arrive in Canada as individuals because the country lacked the skills they possessed and needed professionals to develop the nation.

The military history of the Sikhs also reflects how they were used by others to meet imperial needs. After being defeated by the British in the Sikh Wars, ending in 1849, Sikhs were recruited for the army by their conquerors.

A novel on the Sikh wars contains the note:

"The British paid the Khalsa a genuine compliment by enlisting its veterans in dozens of infantry regiments."<sup>19</sup>

Conan Doyle, in his history of the First World War writes:

"India poured both men and money with a lavish generosity which can never be forgotten in this country."<sup>20</sup> The first Indians to be "seriously engaged" in 1914 in France were the 15th Sikhs on the night of October 24 at Bois de Biez, near Neuve Chappelle; they suffered nearly 200 casualties.<sup>21</sup>

The Menin Gate in Ypres carries the names of over 50,000

soldiers who died in the Salient in Flander's Field - and who have no known graves. Listed here are 400 Indian soldiers, including many Sikhs.

Like the Sikhs, the Scots have been viewed by outsiders as great warriors. They too were defeated in battle by English armies --and then recruited to fight in foreign wars. In the 19th century the Scots were romantized. As urbanization and industrialization accelerated in Britain, the Scots came to be seen as the "wild other", the opposite of social, civilized, orthodox, "bourgeois man." Queen Victoria had John Brown, her faithful Highland retainer. The habit of acquiring exotic attendants spread. Sir John Ross, commander of the British Forces in Canada, had a Sikh aide-de-camp with him when he was in Halifax in 1880. Second lieutenant Victor Duleep Singh, grandson of Ranjit Singh, last ruler of the Punjab, and former owner of the Koh-i-nur diamond --was carried as a supernumerary with the 1st Royal Dragoons.

In 1986, the Tate Gallery in London sponsored a film season on "The Cinema Image of Scotland" which dealt with the way in which the Scots had been presented in this medium. In the accompanying essay, Colin McArthur writes:

"...the power to define identities of the people of the peripheral societies lies elsewhere than in their own hands... the most chilling aspect of this process...is the extent to which people of the periphery come to live with the mental universe fashioned by others and accept it as their 'natural' identity:"<sup>22</sup>

In Hollywood's depiction of the history of the Indian subcontinent, its indigenous peoples are presented as heroes, villains, or simpletons in movies such as *Gunga Din*, *The Drum* and *The Charge of the light Brigade*.

In Britain, an advertisement for whisky shows a wild highlander with a claymore, claiming that obtaining supplies of that spirit a few hundred years ago would have cost you "an arm and a leg." In such ways are old myths about other cultures sustained.

McArthur starts his essay by noting that, "Sometime between 1 January 1760 and 31 December 1830 Europe began to invent Scotland." <sup>23</sup> In *Orientalism*, Edward Said relates how the west has created an east of its own imagining, noting that, "The Orient was almost a European invention." <sup>24</sup> How often have people heard that the west is "materialistic" and the east, "spiritual?"

The whole history of Sikhism refutes this false duality.

In the *Meaning and End of Religion*, Wilfred Cantwell Smith states that, "The development of the Sikh community historically cannot be understood except in the context and behaviour of the Muslim community."<sup>25</sup> He adds that Sikhism has gone through "a standard gradual process of reification... the preaching of a vision, the emergence of followers, the organization of a community, the positing of an intellectual ideal of that community, the definition of the actual pattern of its institutions."<sup>26</sup>

No religion, no community is a static island. An are subject to internal pressures and tensions and others coming from beyond their boundaries.

One problem that all communities face is that of the second generation.<sup>27</sup> Not having known the hardships and struggles of the founders of the community, the next generation is drawn into the wider world around it, lured by its attractions. Immigrants whose sense of community arises from spiritual concerns have particular difficulty in rebuilding it in individualistic, secular countries like Canada and the United States.<sup>28</sup> If they have difficulty in adapting, then they become the objects of study — and of government programmes set up to "help" them. In North America, the idea that instant solutions to complex problems, quick fixes for every ill, dominates government thinking. Edmund Carpenter claims that "media are so powerful they swallow culture."<sup>29</sup> He notes that "between 1946 and 1965, a typical research project began with a government grant and the assembly of an interdisciplinary team...The thought of including someone from the subject group itself never occurred...Every category came from the dominant culture."<sup>30</sup>

Thus the second generation starts to live in, and relate to, a false mental universe created by outsiders. This misrepresentation influences the attitudes and behaviour of others. The recent controversy about the wearing of the *Kirpan* in schools in Calgary is a case in point.<sup>31</sup> Sikhs have stressed that it is a religious symbol, not a weapon. Some Canadians claim that non-Sikhs might snatch a *kirpan* and use it as such --an example of transferring their feelings to others and blaming the victim. In Halifax, police carry revolvers while supervising school dances during off-duty hours.<sup>32</sup> I have yet to hear claims that someone will snatch these weapons and use them.

For the second generation, and for non-Sikhs, it is vital that Sikhs generate authentic material on their history, their traditions,

and their present way of life, and ensure that it is widely disseminated. There are many ways of doing this, through the mainstream media and by public information strategies.

Community development in the past has been stifled by government involvement. Governments are only too willing to fund ventures aimed at solving problems. Unfortunately, this tends to compound the problems rather than solving them. Organizations have come apart as different factions vied for government largesse. Governments' definition of problems often tends to be remote from the real world, and programmes often serve the needs of only a few community members. Government grants can create dependency --and be terminated in arbitrary ways. Given the shifting priorities of governments, grants are usually given for only short-term solutions. In many cases, organizations receiving government grants turn into bureau-cracies or dissolve into anarchy.

The increasing interest in mediating structures in community development reflects a search for systems that can provide security, stability and continuity to community members— and encourage risk-taking, creativity and innovation. Successful mediating structures have three functions. They scan and screen inside and outside the community to identify forces that will influence its future; manage community resources to secure the best returns for the least effort; and identify options for personal, organizational and community development.

Successful community organizations have two characteristics — a sound financial basis and a focus of fidelity. In October this year I visited the New Creation Christian Community in Northamptonshire, England. This Baptist foundation has two very successful businesses that provide employment for community members, many of whom have been rescued from lives of drugs and violence. The community has a common purse through which all earned monies are pooled, and does not rely on government grants or donations from outsiders.<sup>33</sup> In Bradford, England, Sikhs have established their own credit union.

Jean Vanier, founder of the l' Arche community, states:  
 "Our focal point of fidelity at l' Arche is to live with handicapped people in the spirit of the Gospel and the Beatitudes. 'To live with' is different from 'to do for' ... It means that we create relationships of gratuity, trust and interdependence..."<sup>34</sup>

Thus lasting communities retain their identity and integrity by focusing in wards--and outwards--and strengthening the sense of trust and interdependence. Their members avoid separation and assimilation.

Living forms in the Canadian Arctic point the way to the choices before any community in its relationships with other communities.

When caribou fight and tangle their antlers, they die as they struggle to break free of each other. This conflict results in small heaps of bones strewn on the tundra where animals could not disengage from each other. When attacked, muskoxen form a circle, horns pointing outwards. This deterred wolves from attacking the group. But it provided no defence against Peary and his Eskimos who shot these great creatures down where they stood. We came across their skulls in heaps in Northern Ellesmere Island.

In the Canadian North and other harsh lands you find lichen in many shapes and colours. The lichen is a symbiosis between two separate, living forms --alga and fungus. One cannot live without the other, and together they bring colour and life to the bleakest environments. And scientists have not been able to determine how the two different forms create the symbiosis.

Thus they present us with a mystery, rooted in reality, not a theory, concept, model or paradigm. And the very existence of this life form offers an indication of how different cultures, different peoples, different communities can live together in harmony, creating something unique, maintaining their own identities and integrities, avoiding conflict and confrontation and enhancing co-operation in all its man forms.

#### REFERENCES

1. Lotz, Jirn, *Understanding Canada: Community and Regional Development in a New Nation*, Toronto, NCPress, 1977; Lotz,Jim, "Community Development: A Short History," *Journal of Community Development*, May /June, 1987, pp. 41-46.
2. This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Project #410-89-0009).
3. Baroody, William J. Jr., Foreword in Novak, Michael(Ed.) *Democracy and Mediating Structures*, Washington, D.C, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1980.
4. Mathews, Robin, *Canadian Identity: Major Forces Shaping the Life of a People*,

- Ottawa, Steel Rail, 1988, p.I.
5. Bellah, Robert et.al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, New York, Harper and Row, The perennial Library, 1986.
  6. In *Cities on /I Hill* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1987), Frances Fitzgerald discusses four lifestyle enclaves --the homosexual quarter in San Francisco, a Baptist church, a retirement community, and Rajneeshpuram.
  7. Bellah, *op.cit.* p. 72.
  8. In 1990' launched a newsletter, *Christian Community* to serve as a bridge between Christian, secular and other communities.
  9. Zablocki, Benjamin, *The joyful Community*, Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1971.
  10. Nisbet, Robert, *The Social Philosophers: Community and Conflict in Western Thought*, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1973.
  11. "Politics is about far more than what we can all get; it is also about what we owe each other. Too many people have been left out and need to be included. The value of community and solidarity have been undermined and ignored." Quoted in Robert Sheppard's column, "A program with less than meets the ear," *Globe and Mail*, Nov. 21, 1990
  12. Bradely, Kenneth, *Once a District Officer*, London, Macmillan, 1966.
  13. Porter, John, *The Vertical Mosaic: An analysis of social class and power in Canada*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, p.x:ii-xiii.
  14. Quoted in Pross, A Paul, *Group Politics and Public Policy*, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1986, p.1.
  15. In 1989-90, the Economic Council of Canada issued a series of reports on community-based development, and provided an analysis of them in *From the Bottom Up*, a statement published in 1990.
  16. Lotz, Patricia A. *New Patterns for Christian Life*, MTS thesis, Atlantic School of Theology, 1990.
  17. See, for example, the concerns raised by Reginald Bibby, author of *Mosaic Madness: The Poverty and Potential of Life in Canada* in "The lonely road of individualism," *Globe and Mail*, October 23, 1990; Michael Valpy, "Making it too easy to remain diverse," *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 25, 1990; John Dafoe, "Multiculturalism could do with another look," *Globe and Mail*, Nov. 17, 1990; Waiter Block, "Multiculturalism at the Public Trough", *Fraser Forum*, October, 1990, pp.26-27.
  18. Johnston, Hugh, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*, couver, University of British Columbia Press, 1989. The book is available in Panjabi (*B.C. Bookworld*, 4(3), Autumn, 1990.)
  19. Moore, William, *Bayonets in the Sun*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1978.
  20. Doyle, Arthur Conan, *A History of the Great War*. Vol. 1; The British Campaign in France and Flanders, 1914, New York, George H. Doran Co., 1916. p. 34.
  21. *Ibid.*, p. 220-221.
  22. McArthur, *The Cinema Image of Scotland*, London, Tate Gallery Publications, 1986, p.6.
  23. *Ibid.* p.5.
  24. Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1979, p.1.

25. Smith, Wilfred Cantwell, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1978, p. 260.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Murphy, Debra L., *The Failure of the Antigonish Movement in Larry's River, Nova Scotia*. M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie University, Sept. ' 1975. The Antigonish Movement was a very successful adult education/ community development programme in the 1930s: See Lotz, jim and Michael R. Welton, "Knowledge for the People': The Origins and Development of the Antigonish Movement," in Welton, Michael R. (Ed.) *Knowledge for the People*, Toronto, OISE Press, 1987.
28. Sandhu, Sukhdev Singh, *The Second Generation: Culture and the East Indian Community in Nova Scotia*, Halifax, international Education Centre, St. Mary's University, Ethnic Heritage Series II n.d. The study was carried out in May, 1980.
29. Carpenter, Edmund, *Oh, What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me!* New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972, p. 191.
30. *Ibid.* p. 190.
31. This incident received extensive media coverage in Canada, being featured on CBC World News. Short accounts appeared in the *Halifax Mail-Star* of November 20 and 21, 1990.
32. "Police still hired for dances; *Halifax Mail-Star*, Nov. 16, 1990. The school principal was quoted as saying, "The fact that police wear guns while staffing the teen dances is not an issue..."
33. Campbell, John and Jeremy Bird, *Christian Community 'in Central England*, n.p. New Creation Christian Community, 1989.
34. Lotz, Pat. op. cit. p.25.

## 21

## THE CLOSING REMARKS AT V ANCOUVER CONFERENCE\*

By IQBAL SINCH SARA

Mr. Chairman, as this final responsibility to wind up these significant proceedings has been entrusted to me, I propose to be candid.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I will deal with my address.

Upon completion of the compilation of the Guru Granth, at his own dictation to Bhai Gurdas -sometimes said to be the "St. Paul" of Sikhism- the Fifth Guru, Arjan, is said to have directed that the hymns should afterwards be translated by learned men into Indian and foreign languages. To quote the Guru's words:

"so that they might extend over the whole world as oil spreads over water".

As can be appreciated, this scheme of things and other facts make Sikhism an inherently missionary religion.

All of the learned scholars and distinguished speakers here today at this seminar are thus carrying out the Guru's command, "to extend over the whole world, as oil spreads over water". They have come a long way, across the seas, from India, U.K. and U.S.A.

The need for such seminars, in the interests of public education and international peace and understanding, cannot be over-emphasized.

\*International Seminar (Conference) on Sikhs, Sikhism, Culture and Religion, held at the University of British Columbia Campus, Old Auditorium, on December 2nd, 1990.

Under the auspices of :

The Canadian Sikh Study and Teaching Society

The Sikh Students Association of University of British Columbia

The Sikh Association of Simon Fraser University



It is a commendable effort that Canadian Sikhs especially appreciate and can be grateful for. You have (to the speakers) helped disseminate a special outlook on life that Sikhism offers. As scholars you are really fulfilling the Guru's mission. At the same time one has to admit that in this modern age Sikhs are perhaps the worst equipped to spread the missionary religion their Gurus offered to humanity.

"A religion of peasants", did a professor say about Sikhism? Well, almost a century ago an Irish Englishman found himself so inexorably and singularly drawn to Sikhism's charm and simplicity that he ended becoming perhaps the best votary of Sikhism it ever had. As you know, the life long labour of love of Max Arthur Macauliffe consummated in his six volumes on the "Sikh Religion" that he left to posterity. The truth must be that no other single scholar ever since Macauliffe has succeeded so far in depicting Sikhism the way it indeed is. One of the reasons might be that most European or western writers and scholars, even if they were going to be objective, did not know the Gurmukhi language and idiom in which the Guru Granth, the Sikh scripture, is written.

Let me say that the Guru Granth is no more a scripture of peasants and husbandmen than the Bible is of shepherds, fishermen, potters and carpenters' ....

Yet the liaison of man to God could not more exquisitely be expressed as in the Guru Granth, more uniquely so, I submit, because all of it is in verse. What is even more, the cultural aspect too is in-built. Every hymn is indexed as adaptable to a particular classical musical mode, of which there are over thirty sharing the scripture. Vivid flashes of lightning, formations of over-head migrating cranes, the swing of seasons, the life and embraces of spouses, as experienced in the land of Guru Granth, are, for instance on page 488, thus typically encaptured by Sheikh Farid, keeping in sight the metaphysical context:

Katik Kunjaan, Cet dowe, Sawan bijulian;

Sialay sohandian Pir gal bahurian;

Calay calan-har vicaran le manoe,

Gandhedian chhe mah, turindian hik khino.

Only perhaps in Thomas Gray's poem, *Elegy in a Country hurchyard* "you might sense a parallel conjuring the picture of apparent and esoteric reality of things, and I quote:

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,

The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear,  
 Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,  
 And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

The natural expansion of Sikhs and Sikhism in the present age is quite apparent. What certain native as well as foreign writers and scholars seem to be intolerant of is the reality of the definitive self-sufficiency of Sikhs and Sikhism that has been attained in the course of time, as indeed was inevitable. That is where the shoe pinches, so to say.

With all due respect, the dialectics of such published papers as "From Ritual to Counter-Ritual - A rethinking of Hindu-Sikh Question" betray a desperate attempt to deny the process of self-sufficiency in Sikhism, if not also questioning its legitimacy.

It is like berating, Why were you born at all? Why, for Pete's sake, are you breathing? Wer'nt you better off dead?

Well, learned writers and scholars anywhere are free to choose research topics and themes that are most suited to their own individual genius.

But imagine, if I was to be fascinated with the subject of the condition of my mother during her gestation or pregnancy, prior to her delivering, who might stand in the way of my inquiry?

Nevertheless, it is almost impossible to imagine any religious system that did not draw from empirical factors. With minor modifications, the theological exegesis of Christianity reverberates spiritual foundations of Judaism. Islam borrows, consciously or sub-consciously, from both the Judaic and Christian beliefs. Sikhism-in the same line-had the advantage of all of the kindred pre-existing systems.

But to set out to lump Sikhs and Sikhism with the Hindu system, on the reasoning that they emerged from a backdrop of Hinduistic environment, though counter-poised by Islam, and without any valid basis for the aberrative essay, is obviously tantamount to misrepresenting the reality about Sikhs and Sikhism.

To fancy that until a Sikh wrote in 1897 a tract deflecting attempted Brahmanical incursions into Sikhism,

"The Sikhs had shown little collective interest in distinguishing themselves from Hindus"

- is nothing short of belying the entire history of Sikhs and Sikhism, the Sikh volksgeist, and their practice and mode of life that made them distinguishable from the period of the Sikh Gurus, through

the establishment of an independent Sikh kingdom, to the Anglo-Sikh wars and the resulting annexation of Punjab in A.D. 1849.

The fact is that eye-witness Afghan historians almost 150 years preceding the “Ham Hindu Nahin” tract of 1897, are on record in proof of the fact that Sikhs were seen as utterly different from the Hindu population. Just look and see what Qazi Noor Mohammed, the official camp historian of the Afghan invader Ahmad Shah Abdali, who invaded the Punjab for the seventh time in 1764, chronicles in his Persian diary known as the “Jang-Nama”. This is how Qazi Noor Mohammed laments:

“Azan Hinduwan nestandeen sagan,  
Juda-gana rah asteen bad-ragan”

Translated from Persian, it means that:

‘From amongst the Hindus these dogs are NOT;

These bad-ones (contemptuously, bastards) :

‘badragan’, have their own *separate way*. ”

Well, I am grateful to Qazi Noor Mohammed. At the time he might have been our enemy, we are called bastards. But sometimes, I suppose, it pays to be called bastard!

You see, this was in 1764. I am not talking of 1897, I am talking of 1764. This was the crucial period of the Sikh rise as a distinct nation and people, practicing their own separate religion, and a foreign Afghan historian and observer confirms it.

Now, if that is not sufficient to establish the separate collective existence or presence, in A.D. 1764, of Sikhs, demolishing the wishful thesis “From Ritual to Counter Ritual, A Re-Thinking of the Hindu-Sikh Question”, I do not know what else would be.

It should be stated as well that the peculiar customs and practices of the Jats of the Punjab, including the Sikh-Jats, so-called ‘Peasants’ that preoccupy the questionable thesis, are accounted for by the Indo-Scythian ethnology of those people. Several years ago I had occasion to publish a paper, “Scythian Origins of the Sikh Jat”. It notes the link between these people and their forbears from the Central Asian steppes, the Scythians.

All of which reminds me that for some 3 or 4 years now we have a Chair of Sikh Studies at the campus of the U.B.C. in Vancouver. Compared to the work, in terms of quality and character of products, of other similar intellectual centres, of which the Institute of Ukrainian Studies, at Edmonton, comes to mind, what has our Chair in Sikh Studies at U.B.C. done? Or proposes or

intends to do?

It was only after political roadblocks and at considerable public and private financial expense that a Chair in Sikh Studies at the University of British Columbia became possible. Is the momentum, of enthusiasm and expectation of literary advancement on subjects important to Sikhs and Sikhism going to be maintained?

Or is “research” going to be programmed to find ways and means to ring the death knell of Sikhs and Sikhism? Perhaps it has not been there long enough.

There is thought to be an urgent need for public accountability. The administration has to be vigilant. Public concerns, especially from Sikh groups, could perhaps best be addressed by the establishment of a committee composed of public members and university officials that could help evolve the direction and orientation of this Chair in Sikh Studies and its work.

Remember, the Guru’s religion is a missionary religion.. Canadian Sikhs do not propose to suffer, by their own default or negligence, a failure of that mission.

Before I close, I wish to acknowledge the presence of my wife Helga Sara, my daughter Sonia Sara, and my son Reza Har Iqbal. I am fortunate to be able to say that all of them, my immediate family, are graduates of this University.

That is all I have to say, and as a member of your community, and the first Asian-born to have joined the legal profession here 38 years ago, I am honoured, and serving the community and the Guru..... God bless you.

# MISREPRESENTATION OF SIKHISM IN WESTERN ENCYCLOPAEDIAS KHARAK SINGH

## 1. *Introduction*

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to draw the attention of the Sikh public in general, and scholars in particular to the treatment of Sikhism in encyclopaedias and books on comparative religion, published in the West, since the beginning of the present century. There is a wide diversity in the amount of space devoted to the Sikh religion, varying from whole chapters to complete absence in some texts. Treatment of Sikhism as an independent religious system is rare. Frequently Sikhs are described as a sect of Hindus, and Sikhism mentioned, in a passing reference, as an impact of Islam on Hinduism. As compared with other major religions of the world, like Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, etc., the space provided for Sikhism, should be considered insignificant.

1.2 Factual errors are common. For example, many publications show Guru Nanak as a disciple of Kabir. Guru Nanak's mention of some Hindu gods and goddesses, has been given as his acceptance of these deities, although he has repeatedly asserted that they are not worthy of religious devotion. One author has made the frivolous suggestion that Guru Har Gobind (the Sixth Guru) was an employee of Emperor Jehangir. In some texts worship of the Hindu goddess Durga has been attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, although there is overwhelming evidence that he was an uncompromising mono-theist, and that he recognized no other deity except the Akal Purakh or the Timeless Lord.

1.3 Other features are misinterpretation of Guru Nanak's system as a syncretism of elements borrowed from Islam and Hinduism, and the alleged 'pacifism' of Guru Nanak and the 'militancy' of Guru Gobind Singh, questioning the unity of thought of the Ten Masters. Such views are obviously based on a very

superficial study of Sikhism.

1.4 The authors of entries on Sikhism were invariably non-Sikhs. It is hard to believe that no Sikh scholars were available for this purpose. The publishers could at least show the entries to some followers of the Sikh faith, who could point out the obvious mistakes. Guru Nanak is the only Prophet whose original writings are available. In his numerous compositions he has explained his religious philosophy and world-view unambiguously, leaving little scope for misinterpretation. Handicap of the Western non-Sikh scholars appears to have been that they did not have the time or patience to study the original literature a large part of which had not yet been translated into English or some other Western language. In a few cases their views also appear to be visibly influenced by their own chauvinism and bias in favour of their own faith, which makes it difficult for them to see merit in another faith.

1.5 Misrepresentations started appearing as early as the beginning of the present century in the encyclopaedias. These were by and large ingored, and it was hoped that in subsequent publications the entries would be entrusted to more knowledgeable scholars. The hope has unfortunately not materialised, and errors continue to be repeated even in recent publications of the eighties. Sikhs are no more confined to a few districts in the Punjab. A Sikh with a beard and turban is now a common sight almost anywhere in the world. People are curious to know about their faith and culture. The information available in the encyclopaedias is highly misleading, and affects their image. An exercise has, therefore, been undertaken to examine the version of Sikhism in major publications. It is proposed to take up the matter with the Publishers with a view to helping them present a correct picture of the Sikh religion, its founder and its followers. This paper is a part of that exercise, covering relevant extracts from selected texts, with suitable comments. This might, as it should, stimulate interest of scholars in this almost completely neglected area, for the benefit of Sikhs in particular, and the world community in general.

## *II. Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics Vol. IX & XI*

Ed. James Hastings: T. & T Clark, 38 George St. New York: Charles Scribers Sons, 153-157, Fifth Av.

2.1 This is the oldest among the encyclopedias examined, and was published as early as 1917. There are two entries, one on Nanak by J.W. Youngson (Pages 181 to 184 of Vol. IX), and the other on

'Sikhs' by H.A. Rose (Page 507 to 511 of V 01. XI). The authors draw heavily on Ernest Trumpp who is known more for his hostility towards Sikhism than his contribution as a scholar. Another source. M.A. Maculiffe is also mentioned, but is used selectively only where it endorses the biased opinion of Trumpp. For example, while following Trumpp, the Janamsakhis as a source of historical information about the life of Guru Nanak, are summarily rejected as 'rubbish'. The following remarks of Macauliffe are also quoted as implicit support of the conclusion: "We must premise that several of the details of this and of all the current Janamsakhis appear to us to be simply settings for the verses and sayings of Guru Nanak. His followers and admirers found dainty word pictures in his compositions. They considered under what circumstances they could have been produced, and thus devised the framework of a biography in which to exhibit them to the populace."

2.2 Referring to the compositions of the Bhagats included in the Adi Granth, the note records:

"It shows to what extent Nanak was indebted to his predecessors in the Indian field of thought within those limits of time, and how much their influence tended to bring about the remarkable reformation that took place. The reformation had begun before his day. Nanak was fourteen years older than Luther, and died eight years before him, and, when that great reformer took his stand for truth at the Diet of Worms, Nanak was in his humble way seeking to guide the Indian people to the recognition of a personal God. The Indian Reformation was salvation from atheism, and we may see in Nanak the highest and the best it reached,"

2.3 The implication of the above is that Guru Nanak merely carried forward a reformation that had been set in motion by earlier Bhagats, and that its scope was limited to salvation from atheism as compared with the much broader and higher Reformation of Luther. Unfortunately, the author has failed to see, much less understand, the full content of Guru Nanak's message and the revolution brought about by the religion revealed through him, as discussed in this paper.

2.4 But, it does not appear to be the intention of the author to give accurate information about Guru Nanak and the Sikh religion. He appears to be more keen to prove the superiority of his own faith. He writes:

“He (Nanak) fearlessly attacked idolatry, and, if he did not rise to a high degree of spiritual enlightenment, we can only say that Christian truth had not been conveyed to him.”  
and again,

“Although it is the fashion among the Sikhs to regard all their Gurus as true Guru (sat gur), yet, when pressed, they tell us that the true guru is God, and the true guru of the Granth Sahib is not Nanak, but is the supreme, the gur-dev, the incarnation of God, the sinless one, and it cannot fail to strike the least observant reader of the Granth that the only religion that can satisfy the aspirations of the Sikhs, and disclose the identity of the sat gur, and that claims to do so, is the Christian. Whether Nanak was acquainted with the Christian truth is a debated question, but, whether he was or not, we must allow that being in some degree conversant with the Mohammadan faith, he may have known something of the revelation of God in His Word, the true teacher, God-incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2.5 Such remarks about the stature of Guru Nanak, based on ignorance as they are, and the arrogance of the above claims, are certainly not in good academic taste, and are in fact unChristian. The suggestion that Guru Nanak did not realise the Christian truth, whatever that means, is meaningless. The logic behind the conclusion as to who is true guru, is also difficult to accept.

2.6 There are a couple of other errors in the section relating to Sikhs, contributed by Young. On page 508 Gurditta is described as having entered the Udasi order. Gurditta was a householder. In fact he was a soldier, married twice and had children. Also his death was a sequel to a hunting accident. These two facts hardly conform to the cult of the Udasi sect.

2.7 On the same page the author records of Guru Tegh Bahadur saying that he was unworthy of wearing his father's sword, he proclaimed his ambition to be styled Degh Bahadur, or 'Lord of the Vessel', the deg which symbolises the world." One would like to see any reliable historical evidence in its support. For 'Tegh Bahadur' was the title or name given to him much earlier by his great father Guru Har Gobind, when he displayed extraordinary skill in wielding the sword in an encounter with the Mughal forces.

2.8 Describing the Amrit ceremony, it is stated that "a Sikh who is regular in observing of Sikh rules of conduct, stirs with a



dagger some sugar in water in an iron basin, while chanting verses from the Granth,” As a matter of fact, five Sikhs are required to perform the ceremony. *No* single Sikh can prepare or administer Amrit to himself or anyone else.

*Ill. Modern Religious Movements in India*

J.N. Farquhar: The Macmillan Company, New York, 1918 Pages 338-343.

3.1 This commentary is important for the purpose of this paper, since it is among earliest ones recorded in the beginning of this century, and it causes some basic misstatements about Sikhs and their faith, its mistakes have persisted in most of the subsequent publications also. The very first paragraph is as follows

“Nanak (1469-1538), the founder of the Sikh Sect, was a disciple of the famous teacher Kabir. Except in *two* matters, his system is practically identical with that of many Vaishnava sects. It is theism, and the main teaching of the founder is highly spiritual in character. Yet the whole Hindu pantheon is retained. The doctrine of transmigration and Karma and the Indian social system remain unaltered.” Let us examine the above statement briefly in the following paragraph.

*Was Guru Nanak a disciple of Kabir ?*

3.2 The answer is an emphatic No. And no disrespect is meant to the great Saint who is held in highest esteem *by* all Sikhs. Here we are trying to ascertain a historical fact. As it is, Kabir and Guru Nanak were not contemporaries. There is no historical evidence, *to* suggest that they ever met each other, much less had they a teacher-disciple relationship. Kabir was a resident of Benaras, while Guru Nanak lived at Talwandi (now Nanakana Sahib) and Sultanpur Lodhi in the Punjab, until he set out on his divine mission around 1500 AD. Guru Nanak did visit Benaras during his *sojourn* to the East. Kabir had died earlier. None of the reliable Janamsakhis mention a meeting between the Guru and Kabir. During the time of Guru Arjun Dev, approximately 60 years after the death of Guru Nanak, Bhai GurDas wrote a Var giving a brief biographical account of Guru Nanak. Later Bhai Mani Singh *wrote* a biography of the Guru on the behest of Sikhs who felt concerned over the interpolations in Janamsakhis *by* interested parties. Neither of these two writings bear any mention of any meeting between Kabir and Guru Nanak. In the Guru's own writings we do not find any reference *to* a dialogue with Kabir, nor has Kabir or any of his successors ever made such a claim.

3.3 Fundamental difference between Kabir's system and that of Guru Nanak is their attitude towards women and pacificism (*Ahinsa*). Religions like Islam, Judaism and Sikhism accept total social responsibility, and reject celibacy and *Ahinsa*. Kabir, however, was a mesogynist, and accepted *Ahinsa*. This is exactly contrary to the fundamentals of Guru Nanak, who recommends a householder's life and equality of men and women. He also accepts total social participation and responsibility, and clearly rejects *Ahinsa*. True, they are both mono-theists, but their over-all world-views are clearly contrasting. Evidently, a person rejecting *Ahinsa* could "never be a disciple of Kabir.

3.4 The question that remains to be answered is that in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, how did this view as to Guru Nanak being a disciple of Kabir gain currency? Fortunately, apart from the warnings of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Mani Singh against falsification of the life history of Guru Nanak, the question has been examined in detail by M.A. Macauliffe.<sup>1</sup> According to him "There were three great schisms of the Sikh religion which led to the falsification of old, or of the composition of new Janamsakhis. The schismatics were known as the Udasis, the Minas and the Handalis. The first schism of the Sikhs began immediately after the demise of Guru Nanak. Some of his followers adopted Sri Chand, his elder son, as his successor, and repudiated the nomination of Guru Angad." "The second schismatical body of the Sikhs were the Minas. Ram Dass, the fourth guru, had three sons, Prithi Chand, Mahadevand Arjun. Prithi Chand proved unfilial and disobedient, Mahadev became a religious enthusiast, while Arjun, the youngest, followed in" the steps of his father. To Arjun, therefore, he bequeathed the Guruship. Prithi Chand is stigmatised as Mina or deceitful, a name given to a robber tribe of Rajputana. Prithi Chand, however, warned his followers against association with the Sikhs of Guru Arjan." "The Handalis, the third schismatic sect of the Sikhs, were the followers of Handal, a Jat of Manjha, who had been converted to the Sikh religion by Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh Guru. Bidhi Chand, a descendant of Handal, was a Sikh priest at Jandiala, in the Amritsar district. He took unto himself a Mohammadan woman, to whom he was attached rather by ties of love than of law, and upon this he was abandoned by his followers".

3.5 "He then devised a religion of his own, and compiled a Granth and a Janamsakhi. In both he sought to exalt to the rank of

a chief apostle his father, Handal, and degrade Guru Nanak, the legitimate Sikh Guru. For this purpose creative fancy was largely employed. “

The motive behind this is clear, viz., degrading Guru Nanak. The suggestion that Guru Nanak was a disciple of Kabir, is a part of the same conspiracy.

3.6 Kabir is, and will continue to be held in a very high esteem in the Sikh world. The Gurus respected Kabir's teachings, and common areas in their preachings are by no means inconsiderable. That is why Guru Arjun incorporated selected compositions of Kabir in the Adi Granth. Here it is necessary to add that not all works form a part of the Holy Book. Only such compositions as conform to the system of Guru Nanak's thought, have been included.

3.7 With regard to the Hindu Pantheon, which, in the author's view, is retained by Guru Nanak, it must be understood that the deities of Hindu mythology are mentioned in the Guru's compositions only to say that they are not worthy of religious devotion.

### 3.8 *Was Guru Nanak's System Identical with Vaishnavism?*

Very often Guru Nanak's system is confused not only with the Sargun system of Vaishnavas but also with that of Kabir and other Bhagats. Under the superficial identity, however, there is a divergence of a far reaching consequence, which is frequently missed. The subject has been examined in detail by Daljeet Singh. In the limited space available here the best thing will be to quote his conclusion:

“Our discussion reveals that the so-called devotional systems may be divided into three clear-cut categories. To the first category belong Vaisnavism and Nathism where devotion is purely formal and confined mainly to image worship or Yogic, meditational and ascetic practices. The value of ritualism is recognized. In the social field, the caste system forms the sanctified spiritual basis of man's social and moral ethics and duties; or the world is renounced and a monastic life of asceticism and celibacy is taken up . . . The second devotional system is of men like Plotinus, Sufis, Christian mystics and Sants like Kabir, Ravidas and Namdev. The history of this devotional system in India and outside shows that saints of this group, while they accept the principle of human equality, resort primarily to a system of faith and meditation for spiritual attainments. They, as stated by Niharranjan Ray, work just as

individuals, purely for their own salvation or personal, religious and spiritual aims and aspirations. Their love or devotion is directed towards God with the goal of union with Him as an end in itself. Here in the words of Ray, 'there is absolute surrender as much to the personal God as to the established social order.' In this category man's love of God does not move in the field of social concern, responsibility or involvement. The methodology adopted is of meditation and interiority. In the third group, to use the inimitable words of Bergson, man's love of God is transformed into 'God's love for all men', Here the sole religious path, both for the seeker and the superman, is through deeds prompted by the love of man and God's attributive Will. Just as Vaisnavism falls into the first category, Sikhism belongs to the third category."

3.9 In Vaishnavism, like other earlier Indian traditions, the world is considered a misery or suffering, a Mithya, and, for liberation, Sanyasa, asceticism, celibacy and yogic practices enjoy high spiritual value. The religious or spiritual aims and aspirations are personal, with little or no concern for society or the established social order. "In Sikhism or according to Guru Nanak, the world is real In fact, it is the abode of the True Lord, and birth as a human being is a great privilege, since it gives one the great opportunity of not only knowing the truth but also the more glorious privilege of living it; of not only understanding the Creative Will but also of carrying it out. For, God works not through miracles, but through man whose resources and capacity are enormous. Therefore, in Sikhism the ideal is not only to know the truth but to live truth. Realisation of truth is not an end in itself, but only means to the highest end of creative living, the latter alone being the correct test and index of the former. In fact such an effort is not optional but

obligatory, it being the sole measure of spirituality."<sup>2 3</sup>

3.10 The cults of Vaishnavism and Bhakti are much older than Sikhism. Guru Nanak came on the scene much later. A look at the history would indicate that while the Sants and the Vaishnavites carefully avoided involvement in the socio-political field, Guru Nanak, his successors and followers were repeatedly involved in defence of righteousness and confrontation with the forces of oppression and injustice. The fifth and the ninth Guru made supreme sacrifices for this cause. The last Guru. (Gobind Singh) sacrificed his all including his four *sons*, and inspired the entire community of his followers to leap into the struggle which lasted for several decades, and effectively ended the regular tide of

invasions from the North-West that had plagued India for over a thousand years. This contrast in the historical record is not merely incidental. "It represents the compulsive consequences of the ideologies and objectives of the different religious systems."<sup>4</sup>

3.11 This should be enough to show that Guru Nanak's system was not identical with that of Vaishnava sect or Kabir.

3.12 *Indian Social System*: The author says that the Indian social system remains unaltered in Guru Nanak's system. As every one knows the Indian social system was, and still is based on caste system. There are four main castes and hundreds of subcastes in the social hierarchy. The lowest ones are Sudras who are untouchable. Even their shadow is enough to cause pollution, and they have no other rights except to perform menial jobs that the higher castes will not look at. Women also were given a lower status. Guru Nanak's crusade against the caste system is well known. There are numerous verses in which he decries discrimination between man and man on the basis of caste. Examples are:

"I consider all men high and I acknowledge none as low.

One God hath fashioned all the vessels,

One light pervades the Whole creation."<sup>5</sup>

"Appreciate the light, do not ask for caste.

There is no caste hereafter"<sup>6</sup>

"Vain chatter is the boast of caste,

Vain chatter is the boast of fame."<sup>7</sup>

"Caste Can gain nothing,

Truth within will be tested."<sup>8</sup>

Ibid., Var Majh M-I; Pauri 10.

"Of no avail is the caste by birth . . .

A man's caste or faith is determined

by the works he performs."<sup>9</sup>

"(It is said) The dhanna of Jogis is to acquire gnosis.

The. Dharma of Brahmins is what is ordained in the Vedas.

The dharmna of Kshatriyas is the dharma of the brave,

And the dharmna of Sudras is to serve others.

But a universal dharma should be one for all.

Nanak is a slave to one who understands this secret,

For he is the image of the God impeccable."<sup>10</sup>

"There are the lowly among the low castes,

And there are the lowliest among them.

Nanak stands by their side.

Why should he look to the higher castes?"

Where the lowly are cared for,  
It is there that the grace of the Lord is showered.”<sup>11</sup>

3.13 The other major area of inequality in the Indian society was the status of women. Even in higher castes under certain circumstances ‘women were treated like Sudras. Woman was considered deceitful, a temptress, and a hindrance to spiritual progress. Guru anak’s was the first great voice raised in favour of equality of sexes. Towards the end of a long stanza written to plead the cause of equality foromen, he demands:

“How can you call her inferior, who gives birth to Kings?”<sup>12</sup>

3.14 Guru Nanak attacked social vices like *suttee* (burning of widows), female infanticide and slavery. He opened the door of religious, social and material development to all human beings irrespective of caste, creed, sex or social status. He practised every word of what he preached. He chose for his companion a low caste Muslim (Mardana). During his travels he preferred to stay with low caste people over the high castes. At Kartarpur, where he settled eventually, he started a community kitchen where everybody ate together. Everybody worked and was required to do all kinds of duties. His successors continued and even intensified the reforms. Guru Amar Das never granted audience to anybody who was reluctant to eat from the common kitchen. He assigned responsible positions to women in the missionary set up organised by him. Guru Gobind Singh completely abolished the caste system among his devotees by making them drink Amrit from a common bowl at the Amrit (baptism) ceremony. He declared that everybody joining the order was his son.

3.15 It should be abundantly clear from the above that in Guru Nanak’s system the Indian social order received his attention and he materially altered it. In fact what the Guru and his successors achieved, amounts to a complete revolution. The point has been more completely elaborated by Jagjit Singh in his book ‘The Sikh Revolution’<sup>13</sup>

3.16 *Other Comments:* Comments are necessary also on a few other points in the author’s note. Some of these are:

a. On pages 335-336 he writes :

“This volume is called the Adi Granth or ‘Original Book’. The Tenth Guru added a great deal of fresh material; and the result is the Granth Sahib, or Noble Book of the Sikhs.” The correct position is that Guru Gobind Singh did not add any of his compositions to the Adi Granth. The hymns of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, were,

however, incorporated in the volume compiled by the Fifth Guru. His own compositions, were collected much later. The Guruship was conferred only on the Adi Granth, which alone embodies the Canon.

b. At the bottom of page 336 is the following remark:

“The Khalsa became strong to resist the Mughals, but their organisation cut them off from their fellow- countrymen, and made them practically a new caste.” The Khalsa can never become a caste, since it is a voluntary order open to everybody. The caste, on the other hand is determined by birth. The Khalsa was highly respected by the common man because of the sacrifices made by them for the cause of the dharma, righteousness and the poor people. In fact Khalsa provided an ideal, and ordinary people, particularly among the Sikhs, aspired to become its members.

*IV. Hindu World: An Encyclopaedic Survey of Hinduism*

*Vol. II, pp. 396-399,*

*by Benjamin Walker: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.,*

*RuskinHouse, Museum Street, London, 1968.*

4.1 The more important among the points in the section relating to Sikhs in this publication which need comments, are briefly reproduced below:

4.2 Sikhs have been described as a sect of reformist Hindus founded by Nanak . . . who was greatly influenced by the reformer Kabir...who owes much to Kabir’. (Page 396 and 398). On page 121 it is stated:

‘Early in life he (Guru Nanak) came under the influence of the great religious reformer Kabir to whom he was indebted for some of his later doctrines.’

The question of Sikhism as an independent religious system has been discussed in detail earlier, and needs no repetition. The mere fact that the Guru was born of Hindu parents and that majority of his initial followers were of Hindu origin, does not make his religious system a part of Hinduism. Similarly, the position of Guru Nanak vis-a-vis Kabir has been explained in an earlier section. The existence of some common areas in the religious beliefs of the two, does not make one indebted to or a disciple of the other.

4.3 *Guru Tegh Bahadur* : The author records on page 396 :

“It is said that during his imprisonment he (Guru Tegh Bahadur) was charged with looking in the direction of the Emperor’s harem, to which the Guru replied, ‘Emperor, I was not

gazing at your queen's apartments. I was looking in the direction of the Europeans who are coming from beyond the western Seas to tear down your purdah and destroy your empire."

The story is ridiculous and highly improbable, since it assumes (a) that the prison was located in the vicinity of Aurangzeb's harem, (b) that his prisoners awaiting death sentence were free to move out and gaze at the Queen's apartments, and (c) that Guru Tegh Bahadur who gave his life for human rights and religious freedom of his own people, could think of replacing the Moghals with Europeans as rulers. The story was obviously planted by an interested party, of the East India Company to justify and perpetuate its foreign rule over India. A parallel is found in the story invented during the Mughal rule that when Babur met Guru Nanak, the latter blessed him with the Indian Empire for seven generations. Needless to say that this and such stories are baseless.

4.4 *Guru Gobind Singh* : The book acknowledges that "Guru Gobind Singh knew Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic, wrote inspiring poetry of great literary excellence in Punjabi, and was also the author of what is known as the Dasam Granth". (p.396)

It may be added, however, that his works written in :Punjabi, available to- us, are limited. Bulk of his compositions are in Braj Bhasha, and their literary excellence is also unquestionable. Apart from this the author has made some remarks about the Guru, which are damaging and without basis. For example, "He is said to have introduced into Sikhism the worship of the terrible goddess, Durga."

"There is no doubt that the violent philosophy he preached was far removed from the gentle philosophy of pacifism of Guru Nanak. Gandhi referred to him as 'a misguided patriot'." Bhai Vir Singh, the great Sikh scholar, published a book '*Devi Pujan Parta*'<sup>14</sup> in Punjabi, in which he has examined the alleged worship of the goddess Durga by Guru Gobind Singh. He has concluded that the story is a pure fabrication. The Guru was at Paonta Sahib during the period when the *Horn* to please the goddess is alleged to have been performed. In all his known authentic works, the Guru praises only One Supreme Lord, the Akal Purakh. He accepts no other deity including gods, goddesses or even the Avtaars. The same injunction was issued to the Khalsa at the time of Amrit, and has been handed down by tradition to the present day. He taught his disciples not to depend upon gods or goddesses, but be self-reliant. They must wage the fight against evil forces



themselves taking the sword in hand and lay down their lives in the battle field, if necessary. If still the story of the worship of the goddess has persisted, it is because it has been planted in a most subtle manner by Brahmins, the challenge to whose authority started with Guru Nanak, and reached a climax, when Guru Gobind Singh opened the doors of the Khalsa Order to one and all who believed in One Akal Purakh and were prepared to fight for the cause of dharma or righteousness.

4.5 The alleged discrepancy between the philosophies of Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Nanak results from a superficial look and a lack of understanding in depth. In fact it does not exist. Guru Nanak never preached a philosophy of pacificism. Realising that the root cause of people's misery was their spiritual degeneration, he emphasized the need for their spiritual uplift. But he did not neglect the worldly aspect of life. He exhorted the people to uphold their honour and self respect and fight the tyrant. He says:

“Should one's honour be violated, while living,  
all one eats is undeserved,”<sup>15</sup>

Again

“To what avail are worship without honour,  
Sanyam without truth, and the sacred thread  
Devoid of moral restraint?”<sup>16</sup>

He founded a society that would face aggression like heroes. His challenge was:

“If you want to play the game of love,  
come to my path, holding your head on your palm.”<sup>17</sup>

Again, he calls God ‘Destroyer of the evil’, ‘Annihilator of the devilish’, and

‘If God wills, He brandishes the sword  
to cut the head of the enemy.’<sup>18</sup>

4.6- When Babur invades India, and his troops plundered cities and temples and murdered countless innocent men, women and children, Guru Nanak could not remain quiet and content with his rosary. His famous composition ‘Babur Vani,’<sup>19</sup> expresses his deep anguish over the atrocities committed by the ‘Horde of Sin’, as he calls the army of Babur. He not only condemned the aggressor, he also took to task the local rulers for their, unpreparedness and failure to protect their subjects. “If a powerful lion attacks a herd of cattle, the master is squarely responsible.” he said. He

shared the intensity of his feelings with God thus: "O Lord, did you not experience any pain over the suffering of such magnitude?"

In the light of the above views who would say that Guru Nanak preached a philosophy of pacifism?

4.7 The fifth Gum, Guru Arjun Dev, affirms Guru Nanak's philosophy. In the same vein this apostle of peace says:

"First accept death, forget the desire to live,  
and then with humility come to me." <sup>20</sup>

Guru Gobind Singh's philosophy was no different. He declares, 'When all other means fail, it is justified to take the sword in hand in the cause of righteousness.' <sup>21</sup> Thus, when Guru Gobind Singh launched the Khalsa Order, he simply carried out something that was envisaged in Guru Nanak's plans. In the word of Dr Gokal Chand Narang 'the steel required for the sword of Guru Gobind Singh was provided by Guru Nanak.' <sup>22</sup> The complete unity, consistency and continuity of the message of all the Ten Gurus including Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh, are expressed in the Guru Granth Sahib: "Ika bani Ik Gur Iko sabad veechar" <sup>23</sup> (Trans: The Revelation is one, the Guru is one, the interpretation or contemplation of the Word is also the same.)

4.8 Reference to Guru Gobind Singh as a 'misguided patriot' could only result from a lack of study of the Guru's life and philosophy and from ignorance of political, social and religious conditions of his times. In Bachittar Natak the Guru has stated the purpose of his birth very clearly. It was to propagate dharma, protection of the saints and to end oppression and tyranny, both political and religious. He had come to guide humanity out of superstition, political subjugation and misery. His was a divine mission. Who could misguide him? He had studied the history of previous centuries during which all non-violent means had been tried without success. He realised what should be obvious to any impartial student of Indian history, that adherence to *ahimsa* in all situations, had done incalculable harm to the society, and was responsible for its misery. He reached the most carefully considered conclusion that "for a righteous cause, when all other means fail, it is justified to take to arms." <sup>24</sup> That is what he did. He inspired the people to fight for their honour and freedom. He organised them and trained them. He taught them to make sacrifices for a noble cause and to overcome the fear of death with his personal example. The humble people, who had been treated worse than animals, saw in him their saviour, and responded to

his call. Under his guidance and inspiration, the people shed the fear of the mighty Moghal Empire, and after a prolonged struggle succeeded in bringing about its downfall, and establishing their own government. It was due to Guru Gobind Singh that freedom dawned in the country after centuries of slavery. How could Guru Gobind Singh be called an innovator, when five out of the Ten Gurus maintained an army and wielded the sword, and when the Fifth of them had created a 'state within a state', and, apart from organising the wherewithal for militarisation, had left instructions for his young son, Guru Hargobind, to raise an army. The subsequent Gurus including Guru Gobind Singh only continued the tradition.

4.9 For Mahatma Gandhi *Ahimsa* or non-violence was a creed and a cure for all ills. Let us take one incident out of Indian history, reported by the official reporter of Mahmud Ghaznavi who invaded India several times during the eleventh century. He records that when Mahmud's troops were plundering the famous Hindu Temple of Somnath and breaking the images of the deities, people from the neighbouring 300 villages collected and sat chanting *Mantras*. Not one of them resisted or raised a little finger to stop the soldiers from desecrating the Temple. Probably they had received the traditional pacifist 'guidance' from some Mahatma. Anybody who would fight or ask others to fight, would be dubbed as 'misguided'. *Ahimsa* or pacifism has its votaries, but the Sikh Gurus are not among them. It is both self-righteous' and narrow for Toynbee to measure Prophet Mohammad by the pacifist standards of his own religion and criticize him severely. It is equally myopic for pacifist Gandhi to see Guru Gobind Singh through the lens of his own prejudices, especially, when it is well known that he gave up pacifism, when it suited his interests. In Sikhism the ideal is a 'Saint Soldier' (Sant Sipahi) or *Gurmukh*, and not a pacifist recluse who is considered escapist.

4.10 *Ranjit Singh*: It has been stated that when Maharaja Ranjit Singh died, four of his wives and seven slave women were burnt with him in accordance with the Hindu practice of *suttee*". While this may be a historical fact, it needs to be pointed out that the practice was strongly condemned by the Gurus. The Sikh religion does not approve of it. The Maharaja had died. He cannot be held responsible for the act of *suttee*. The fact is that it was his Hindu wives who did the *suttee* according to their own beliefs.

4.11 *Guru Granth Sahib*: The remarks regarding the Granth

Sahib include the following:

"The Granth does not quite escape polytheism, as it practically assumes the Hindu pantheon, and it accepts the doctrine of *Karma* and transmigration."

"In the course of time the Granth suffered many doctrinal modifications and has yielded much to Hinduism. The teachings of Guru Gobind Singh were again of a different character, being militant, in accordance with the needs of the age in which he lived."

The above observations show complete ignorance of Guru Granth Sahib and Sikh history. No doubt, the Sikhs accept the doctrine of Karma and transmigration. However, Sikhs believe strictly in One God, and Guru Granth Sahib clearly rejects polytheism. The Guru Granth starts with the Mul Mantra beginning with Ik Onkar, which means that there is only One God who is immanent. According to the Sikh Gurus, God is a Being to be approached and loved, as a fond and faithful wife loves her spouse. Guru Nanak calls Him Nirankar, that is, without form. Bhai Gurdas spoke of Him as formless, without equal, wonderful and not perceptible by the senses. At the same time all the Gurus believed that He is immanent in His creation. In fact, the Guru emphasizes that "God is One, brother, He is One Alone."<sup>25</sup>

4.12 There has not been even the slightest change, doctrinal or otherwise, in the text of the Granth Sahib. In fact, any attempt to make a change would be regarded as heresy. The authenticity of the present *Bir* of the Granth Sahib, was earlier established by Bhai Jodh Singh,<sup>26</sup> and has recently been confirmed by Daljeet Singh.<sup>27</sup> The *bani* of Guru Gobind Singh was never incorporated in the Adi Granth, which alone is the scripture and the Guru or the Sole Guide. So the question of modifications on this account does not arise. With regard to militancy of Guru Gobind Singh, it has been shown earlier, that this was no innovation of the Guru. Four earlier Gurus had maintained an army, and Guru Nanak had himself rejected *Ahimsa* as a creed.

4.13 *Other Remarks:* Some of the other remarks in this entry that deserve attention, are reproduced below:

"Critics have frequently pointed out that while Sikhism ostensibly dropped many features of Hinduism, it has itself adopted similar features in a disguised form."

"Nanak is regarded as an incarnation of God. It is believed that Nanak performed miracles. The other Gurus are regarded as incarnations of Nanak, assuming his divinity upon their formal

installation.”

“Sikhism set its face against ceremonial and meaningless repetition of the name of God, although Sikhs now lay great emphasis on the Name.”

4.14 Sikhs do not believe in the theory of Avtaarhood or Incarnation. Guru Nanak declared in the Mul Mantra that God is *Ajuni*, i.e., He never takes birth. The so-called avtaars or prophets are His creation. “Cursed be the tongue that says ‘God incarnates’.”<sup>28</sup> records the Guru Granth. Guru Nanak never claimed that he was God incarnate, nor did any of his successor do so. They considered themselves His servants. Guru Gobind Singh warns:

“He who calls me God, shall fall into the fire pit of hell. I am the servant of the Supreme Lord, come to see the wonderful Drama of this world.”<sup>29</sup>

After having baptised the Five Piyaras, he, in all humility, requested them to baptise himself. No knowledgeable Sikh has ever claimed that the Gurus were incarnations of God. They are given profound reverence for the Lord’s Word delivered through them.

4.15 Neither Guru Nanak, nor any other Guru ever claimed any miracles, and there is no mention of these in the Adi Granth. Bhai Gurdas has quoted Guru Nanak as saying, “Apart from the Word of the Lord and the holy congregation, there is no other miracle.”<sup>30</sup> The stories invented by some ignorant or interested people, should not be confused with the spirit of Sikhism or the Gurus’ teachings.

4.16 The doctrine of Naam in Sikhism is not mere repetition of a name. In fact, the Guru Granth clearly says “Everyone repeats God’s name. But such repetition is not the way to God.”<sup>31</sup> “With guile in the heart he practices guile, but mutters God’s name. He is pounding husk, and is in darkness and pain.”<sup>32</sup> “One mutters God’s name, but practices evil daily. In this way heart is not purified.”<sup>33</sup> Naam is realisation of the immanence of God in everything, and expresses itself as love and service of humanity, following the examples of the Gurus themselves. For, the Guru Granth says that it is by” one’s deeds that man is assessed in His Court, and “by our deeds alone we are near or away from God.”

*V Asian Religions: Geoffrey Parrinder; Sheldon Press, London (1977)*

5.1 *The author has made the following observations :*

‘Nanak did not intend at first to found a sect, but disciples

were attracted by his teaching. The word Sikh means 'disciple'. He declared 'There is no Hindu and no Muslim'. This bold utterance and his songs, attracted considerable attention. He passed his life partly in teaching and partly in retirement.

"As a poet Nanak differs from Kabir, but as a social and religious reformer, he did much to bring Hindus and Muslims together. He strongly opposed formalism in worship, and inculcated devotion to one God."

"Persecution under the Mughals caused the Sikhs to take up arms, and henceforth they have regarded themselves as a military brotherhood, more akin to missionary Islam, usually distasteful to Hindus. Distinctive features were adopted for Sikhs which have remained as their badge: the hair must not be cut, a steel comb, a bangle must be worn, together with shorts and a sword."

5.2 There is one factual error in the above statements. A 'steel' comb is mentioned in the five distinctive features for Sikhs. While a comb is one of the five K's, it need not be of steel. More often and almost always the comb worn by Sikhs is wooden. It is believed that the combs adopted by the Five Piyaras, when they were initiated by Guru Gobind Singh, were wooden. There could, however, be no objection against a steel comb either.

5.3 *The other mistaken suggestion is* : "Persecution under the Mughals caused the Sikhs to take up arms." There is no doubt that the Sikhs resisted persecution. But it was not merely a reaction to circumstance. It was in accordance with the doctrines laid down by the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, who had enjoined upon his followers to resist oppression and injustice not only on themselves but even on others who were weak and poor. Guru protested strongly against tyranny of the invaders and oppression of the local rulers. The Guru preached a whole life philosophy that involved defence of self and society and full development of the individual and the society, socially, spiritually and economically. His successor, Guru Angad did not neglect any of these aspects. He took concrete steps to develop the physical fitness and fighting qualities of his disciples. There is a 'gurdwara' at Khadur Sahib, called 'Mal Akhara' (literally Wrestlers' Ring) at the spot where he used personally to supervise wrestling and other physical fitness activities of his disciples. Diet in the Langar or the common kitchen received personal attention of the Guru's wife, Mata Khivi ji. This was continued during the Third and the Fourth Gurus. The Fifth Guru, Arjun Dev ji gave special military training to his son, Har

Gobind, who became the Sixth Guru after the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev while in Mughal captivity. Guru Hargovind formally donned two swords, one the insignia of *miri* (empirical life), and the other of *piri* (spiritual life). Following instructions of his father, he organised a regular army, and actually fought and won several battles with the local Moghal Chiefs or Rulers. The two swords meant that the *miri* aspect which had always been there, became more visible than it had been earlier, because of the increased numerical strength and better organisation of the Sikhs. The two swords also demonstrated that the *piri* aspect was equally important, and that it was not neglected or discarded, as some critics would have us believe. In Sikhism the strength for physical resistance to evil or oppression and injustice, derives from spiritual development. So emphasis on spiritual aspect continued undiminished. There was no doctrinal change involved in wearing two swords by Guru Hargobind. It is very important to understand that in Sikhism the insignia for *piri* (spirituality) is also a sword, and not a rosary, showing the basic combination of the spiritual with the empirical in Guru Nanak's system.

5.4 Another statement that needs to be contradicted is that "He (Guru Nanak) passed his life partly in teaching and partly in retirement." This indirectly suggests that the Guru became a recluse and gave up interest in life and the world. This is absolutely incorrect. He never retired, but actively carried on his mission upto the last day of his life. He made sure that the mission continued even after his death, by appointing a worthy successor like Guru Angad Dev, who was selected after a very rigorous test.

5.5 It is incorrect that Guru Nanak at first did not intend to found a society, or that he passed his time partly in retirement, or that it became a military brotherhood because of Moghal persecution. Guru Nanak's system is based on a whole-life philosophy, involving full development of the individual and society, in their spiritual, social and economic aspects. Since his religion accepts combination of the spiritual and empirical aspects of life, or the *miri-piri* doctrine, he organised a fraternal society, recommending total participation and responsibility in all walks of life and making reaction against injustice an essential duty of the religious man. It was in this context that militarisation of the society took place, since Sikhism permits the use of force as a last resort for a righteous cause. The Indian society suffered from two major maladies, viz., caste discrimination in the social field and injustice

and oppression in the political field. The Sikh society created institutions and succeeded to a large extent in solving both of these problems. He founded a classless community of his followers, in which everybody like himself, worked, and ate together from a common kitchen, in a '*pangat*', regardless of caste or origin. His concept of equality between man and woman was revolutionary. Most Indian traditions regarded her as a 'temptress', a 'nagini', a gateway to hell', 'polluted' and unworthy of spiritual pursuits. Elaborating the crucial role of woman in society and in life, Guru Nanak asked, "How can you call one, who gives birth to kings, inferior?" Guru Nanak's concept of perfect equality, arises from the immanence of God in all creatures., and His Love. His love and concern *for* the common man expressed itself in protests against exploitation of the poor and the weak. He condemned the brutalities and barbarities perpetrated by the invaders, whom he described as 'horde of sin'. He took to task the local rulers for their unpreparedness to face the invading armies, and called them 'man-eating beasts', and their officials as 'hounds' for their exploitation of the poor, innocent and helpless subjects. He attacked the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, who had become a party to the plunder and the exploitation. He criticised the *yogis* and the ascetics, for their parasitism and escapism. He raised a strong voice against oppression and injustice, and exhorted the people to resist these. In fact, he founded a society to resist evil in society and to fight injustice. Thus was laid the foundation of the doctrine of *miri-piri*, which became a fundamental element in the Sikh philosophy.

VI. "*Dictionary of Comparative Religion*":

Ed. S.G.F. Brandon; Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. 1970  
(Ninian Smart)

6.1 *An extract from the entry on Sikhism is reproduced below:*

"Sikhism: The Sikhs (literally 'Disciples'), though belonging orig. to a movement designed to see unity between best in Islam and best in Hinduism have evolved a distinctive relig. and culture of their own. . . . The tendencies towards unified devotionism were crystallised in the life and teachings of Nanak, first of the ten Gurus or leader of Sikh community. He preached unity of God. . . . centrality of devotion (Bhakti), summed up in the repetition of divine name, equality of men of different castes, evils of image worship, importance of brotherly love and need of a guru as a guide. None of these elements was precisely orig. to Nanak." (page



576).

6.2 The above interpretation of Sikhism as a blend or amalgam of selected features drawn from Hinduism and Islam, denying any originality to Guru Nanak, has been repeatedly advanced by some Western scholars. This notion of syncretism, is obviously based on a superficial study of Sikhism or the doctrines of Guru Nanak. No religion has survived on borrowed ideas in history. Din-i-Ilahi of Akbar is a well known example. Sikhism is a revealed religion based on the mystic experience of its founder, Guru Nanak, of the Reality or God. He saw God as 'All Love, the rest He is ineffable.,'<sup>34</sup> He saw God as 'Creator who is immanent in His creation, loves it and looks after it'. He saw God as Ocean of Virtues. He saw God as Self-existent and as One who never takes birth. The roots of Guru Nanak's religious life lie in his unique experience of Love of God. Guru Nanak's Bhakti is not mere repetition of a name. His bhakti is an intense love of God and His creation which expresses itself in the service of mankind, and carrying out His altruistic Will. In fact the goal in Sikhism is to recognise and carry out the altruistic Will of God. Most religions are a search for Truth. Guru Nanak went a step further. He said: 'Truth is higher than everything; Higher still is True Living.'<sup>35</sup> Virtuous deeds based on morality and ethics form the crux of Guru Nanak's system. 'It is one's deeds that determine one's closeness to God.'<sup>36</sup> He believed the world to be real, as God's creation, and decried its rejection as Mithya. He rejected monasticism and ascetic ways of life, and insisted upon a householder's life, accepting all domestic and social responsibilities, as a part of 'the practice of religion. He said: "He alone recognises the way to God, who earns an honest living and shares it with others in need".'<sup>37</sup> His notion of equality crossed all previous boundaries, and assumed dimensions which can never be surpassed. He not only condemned the thousands year of old caste system, but took practical steps to abolish it. His companion during his famous world trips was a low-caste Muslim, Mardana. At Kartarpur he continued his mission, created a society in which everybody worked and ate together from a common kitchen or langar.

6.3 Evidently Guru Nanak gave a completely new system of religious thought based upon his own mystic experience. Its concept of the Ultimate Reality, nature of the Reality, its goals, the methods prescribed to achieve the goal, its world-view and approach to life, its emphasis on moral and ethical deeds, its

activism, its acceptance of social responsibility, all point towards its uniqueness and independent status as a religion. It is failure to grasp these elements that has led to suggestions of syncretism in the interpretation of Sikhism. There are scores of hymns in the Granth Sahib, 'in which Guru Nanak criticises the old traditions. How could he borrow anything from those traditions? Of course, whatever was true in the old religions, and synchronized with his own spiritual experience, was included in the Guru's system, since, as the Third Nanak says, "Truth never becomes obsolete"<sup>38</sup>."

6.4 Common areas are bound to exist amongst all religions; particularly monotheistic religions. Sikhism is no exception. A few common features with Hinduism or Islam, do not justify a syncretic interpretation. In fact there are more common features between Judaism and Christianity, than between any other two religions. Hence the suggestion is irrelevant, and indicates the Christian missionary's zeal, rather than a factual reality.

*VII. The encyclopaedia americana international edition volume 24*

American Corporation. International Headquarters 575 Lexington Avenue, New York. copyright Philipines.1977

7.1 The entry includes the following observations:

"Sikhs, seks, are followers of the Sikh religion, particularly of Guru Gobind Singh, and, by extension, a communal group of East Punjab, India. . . . . The religion combines elements of Islam and Hinduism."

"When Nanak began teaching in 1499, there was almost complete lawlessness under the weak Lodi dynasty and the government was taking active measures to repress Hinduism. Nanak's doctrines in large part were a response to these chaotic conditions. The core of his belief was Hindu but he was undoubtedly greatly influenced by Islam."

(Page 808)

7.2 The above views do not show any serious study or knowledge of Sikhism and are apparently based on the 'syncretic' interpretation of Sikhism, which has been adopted by some Western writers without carefully studying the origin and the doctrines of Sikhism or the teachings of its founder, Guru Nanak. This view has been repudiated and correct position explained in an earlier section. The conclusion may, however, be repeated that Sikhism is a revealed religion based on the mystic experience of Guru Nanak with the Ultimate Reality or God who is the Creator of the universe. God is ineffable, but He is All Love. He is immanent

in His creation, loves it and looks after it. A Sikh must express his love for God through service of mankind. He should, therefore, stay in the world and discharge all his domestic and social responsibilities. He should not reject the world as 'mithya' or unreal. He should not take to monasticism or asceticism, which, in the Guru's opinion, are tantamount to parasitism and escapism. The goal of a Sikh is to carry out the altruistic Will of God, which inevitably involves resistance to oppression and injustice. The Guru's doctrines have an eternal relevance, and it is wrong to call them a response to one particular situation that prevailed under Lodi rule during the times of Guru Nanak. In fact, Guru Nanak's system is a whole-life or *miri-piri* system that in its essentials, is opposed to the earlier Indian systems that are dichotomous, suggesting withdrawal from empirical life and its responsibilities.

#### *VIII Conclusion*

8.1 It should be clear from the preceding examples that many encyclopaedias published in the West, contain serious errors of fact as well as understanding of Sikh religion. The list given in this paper is by no means exhaustive. It is only a sample. However, it should not be difficult to imagine the damage done to the cause of Sikhism and the image of its followers, by such wrong views being propagated in the numerous encyclopaedias and other such publications in circulation. It is necessary, therefore, as indicated in the beginning of this paper to examine all the entries on Sikhism, contradict misrepresentations and take up the matter with the publishers, and editors concerned, to ensure necessary corrections in future editions. The present alarming situation demands strict vigilance on the part of scholars in particular, and followers of Sikhism in general. A periodical giving abstracts of all new publications on Sikh religion, history and culture, and highlighting controversial views, would be justified. (Since then the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh has started a half yearly periodical called, Abstracts of Sikh Studies).

#### REFERENCES

1. Macauliffe, M.A. : "The Sik.' Religion", Vol. I, Introduction; S. Chand & Co. New Delhi; 1963 Edition, p.LXXIX.
2. Daljeet Singh: "The Sikh Ideology"; Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, 1984, pp-126-128.

3. Ibid., 128-129.
4. Ibid., 128
5. Guru Granth : Sri Rag M-I, Astpadi 6.4.
6. Ibid., M-I; Asa 1.3.
7. Ibid., Var Sri Rag M-I; Sloka 1, Pauri 3.
8. Ibid., Var Majh M-I; Pauri 10.
9. Ibid., Rag Parbhathi 4.10.
10. Ibid., Sloka Sahaskirti 4.
11. Ibid., Sri Rag; Page 15.
12. Ibid., Var Asa; page 473.
13. Jagjit Singh: "The Sikh Revolution", New Delhi, 1984.
14. Bhai Vir Singh: "Devi Pujan Partal" (Punjabi); Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar.
15. Guru Granth: Var Majh, M-I; page 142.
16. Ibid., Ramkali M-I; page 903.
17. Ibid., Sloka 1; page 1412.
18. Ibid., M-I, page 145
19. Ibid., Tilang M-I; page 722.
20. Ibid., Var Maru, M-5, page 1102.
21. Guru Gobind Singh : "Zafarnama",
22. Gokal Chand Narang : "Transformation of Sikhism".
23. Guru Granth : Var Sorath; M-4; page 646.
24. Guru Gobind Singh : "Zafarnama".
25. Guru Granth: Asa, M-I; page 350.
26. Jodh Singh : "*Kartarpuri Bir de Darshan*" (punjabi); Punjabi Univ. Patiala; 1968 Edition.
27. Daljeet Singh: "Authenticity of Kartarpuri Bir"; Punjabi Univ. Patiala; 1987.
28. Guru Granth : Bhairon M-5, Page 1136
29. Guru Gobind Singh : "Bachittar Natak".
30. Bhai Gurdas: "Varan"; Var 1.42.
31. Guru Granth : page 491.
32. Ibid., page 1199
33. Ibid., page 732
34. Ibid., Asa, M-5; Page 459
35. Ibid., Sri Rag M-I; page 62
36. Ibid., Japu ji; page 8.
37. Ibid., Var Sarang M-4; page 1245.
38. Ibid., Var Ramkali; page 946.

## 23

# NEED FOR WORLD INSTITUTE OF SIKHISM

## KHARAK SINGH

### I GURU NANAK'S REUGION

1.1 Sikhism, a revealed religion, is the latest among the major world faiths. This system, as preached by Guru Nanak, has a universal appeal and an eternal relevance. Some of its essential features may be briefly reproduced below:

- a. *Monotheism*: Guru Nanak believed in only One God as the ultimate Reality. In the Mul Mantra he described Him thus; 'The Sole Supreme Being; of eternal manifestation; Creator; Immanent Reality; Without Fear; Without Rancour; Timeless Being; Unincarnated; Self-Existent:
- b. *b.Reality of the World*: Guru Nanak rejected the earlier view of the world being *mithya* or unreal or a place of suffering, and human life a punishment. Since God is Real, he argued, so is His creation - 'the continents, the universes, the worlds and the forms. . : 'In the midst of air, water, fire and the nether regions, the world has been installed as *Dharamsal* or a place for righteous actions: 'This world is the abode of the Lord who resides in it: 'Human life is a rare opportunity for spiritual fulfilment:
- c. *Goal of Life*: In Sikhism the goal is not *moksha*, *Nirvan* or personal salvation after death. It is the status of *gurmukh* or *sachiaara* or a Godman to be attained in life itself. A *gurmukh* is attuned to the Will of God, and engages himself in carrying out the Divine Will., There is no selfishness in his goal. He wants to liberate not only himself but the whole world.
- d. *The Methodology*: Guru Nanak did not accept the dichotomy between empirical and spiritual lives preached by earlier systems. Asceticism which was considered essential for spiritual attainments, was described by the Guru as escapism and parasitism. He advocated a householder's life, with

emphasis on hard work, honest means for a livelihood, and sharing of earnings with others in need. God loves His creation, and takes pleasure in looking after it. In fact He is immanent in it. So the Godman must also love his fellow beings and carry out the Divine Will through altruistic deeds. Only thus can one find the path to Him. Full social participation, and struggle against oppression, injustice and tyranny in the cause of the poor and the weak, are an essential part of the Guru's system. While the need for worldly pursuits is recognised, there is a very clear warning against acquisitiveness, accumulation of wealth and indulgence or what is called consumerism. Ritualism is condemned. Instead the emphasis is on Naam, i.e., remembering God or keeping Him in mind or being conscious of Him always. This means a realization of His immanence in the entire creation, or living in His presence all the time. All this comes under *sach achar* or truthful living which, the Guru says, is even higher than truth. Sikhism is, therefore, a system of noble deeds and moral conduct. It is the deeds that determine whether one is close to or away from God.

- e. *Equality and Human Dignity:* Sikhism recognises no distinction between man and man on the basis of birth or otherwise. The Guru rejected the 3,000 year old caste system in India, and accepted and associated with the lowliest among them. His concept of equality for women can never be surpassed. 'How can she be considered inferior, when she gives birth to kings?' he asked. He also preached a life of honour and dignity. 'He who lives with dishonour, does not deserve the food he eats', says the Guru.
- f. *Removal of Inhibitions:* Apart from the caste system, which restricted one's right to spiritual pursuits and selection of occupation, there were several other restraints in earlier religious systems in India. Ahimsa, celibacy, vegetarianism, and asceticism were considered essential in the practice of religion. He rejected all these and recommended a householder's life with emphasis on noble deeds, dignity of labour, service of humanity and full social responsibility. Later the Tenth Master confirmed this through his famous *Nash* Doctrine by which he broke away from all earlier traditions.
- g. *Development of the Society:* The Guru was not concerned with

the individual alone. His concern covered the society as a whole also. Based on the gospel preached by him, he founded a settlement towards the end of his mission at Kartarpur, which was open to all, and in which everybody worked and ate together. People subdued under the rigours of caste system, the oppressive alien rule and religious bigotry, could not be expected to take over the social responsibilities and adjust to the liberation offered in the new society, overnight. This infant society had to be nurtured for some time, and it had to spread geographically. So the Guru introduced the system of succession under which nine Gurus carried the mission forward upto the time Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa. A practical demonstration of Guru Nanak's system had been given. Personal successor after the Tenth Lord was not considered necessary, and the guruship was conferred on the Adi Granth and Guru Granth Sahib, or the *shabad* or the 'Word' of the Lord.

- h. *The Scripture*: The Adi Granth, compiled by Guru Arjun Dev, with later addition of *bani* of Guru Tegh Bahadur is the sacred scripture of the Sikhs. As pointed out above, the scripture was given the status of *guru* by the Tenth Master. This appointment of the Scripture or the Word as Guru is unique to Sikhism. It simply means that in spiritualism the real guru is the 'Word' or the command or *shabad* of the Lord, and not the human body. Also it is only in Sikhism that the Scripture was written and authenticated by the founder himself or his successors. In other religions the scriptures were written decades or even centuries after the founders had left.

1.2 Besides the above there are some other features that need to be mentioned. In contrast to earlier systems, Sikhism is a life-affirming faith with a positive attitude towards the world. It is a religion of activism, noble actions and altruistic deeds. It is a religion of hope and optimism with rich traditions of *charhdi kala* or ever-rising high spirits. Pacifism and pessimism have no place in Sikh thought. Sikh discipline is a conscious effort to live in harmony with nature and to carry out the altruistic Divine

1.3 Macauliffe in his classic study 'The Sikh Religion' (1910), summed up the moral and political merit of the Sikh Religion thus:

"It prohibits idolatry, hypocrisy, caste-exclusiveness, the concrementation of widows, the immurement of women, the use of wine and other intoxicants, tobacco smoking, infanticide, slander,

pilgrimage to sacred rivers and tanks of Hindus; and it inculcates loyalty, gratitude for all favours received, philanthropy, justice, impartiality, truth, honesty and all the moral and domestic virtues known to the holiest citizens of any country.”

On the originality of the Sikh religion Macauliffe’s conclusion was:

“The illustrious author of *Vie de Jesus* asks whether great originality will again arise, or the world would be content to follow the paths opened by the daring creators of the ancient ages. Now there is here presented a religion totally unaffected by Semitic or Christian influences. Based in unity of God, it rejected Hindu formalities, and adopted an independent ethical system, rituals and standards which were totally opposed to the theological beliefs of Guru Nanak’s age and country. And we shall see hereafter, it would be difficult to point to a religion of greater originality or to a more comprehensive ethical system.”

1.4 The religion and the society founded by Guru Nanak grew steadily and in the hands of his successors brought about a complete revolution in the minds of the people as well as in the social and political setup in the North-West of India. His followers challenged the oppressive Mughal rule, overthrew it, and supplanted it with an empire of their own based on egalitarian principles and freedom of religious practice, with real power in the hands of the common people who had had nothing but oppression and exploitation at the hands of earlier rulers. The values taught by Guru Nanak are as relevant today as in the 15th century when he started his mission. The world today needs this faith of hope and optimism that preaches ‘*sarbat da bhala*’ (welfare of all). The Sikhs owe it to the world to share their rich heritage with the rest of mankind. Even more, they need to do this in their own interest in order to project a correct image of themselves.

## II THE PRESENT POSITION

2.1 The followers of Guru Nanak are no more confined to the land of Five Rivers or within the borders of the Indian Union. They have migrated to practically all parts of the world with sizeable populations in the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States of America, and other countries of Europe, America, Asia and Africa. With their turbans, unshorn hair which dominate their external appearance, they are easily distinguished, and become the object of curiosity. Missionary efforts have not kept pace with the requirements of Sikh emigrants, and as a result, they have often



become the victims of suspicion and misunderstanding abroad. Reactions of the local population in other countries to the presence of Sikhs have varied from a rare appreciation, through common curiosity, to not infrequent positive hostility.

2.2 While the Sikh community in general and their organisations in particular, have been completely indifferent to the need for projecting the Sikh philosophy and history to the outside world, it seems that some hostile agencies have been very active in misrepresenting Sikhism and tarnishing the image of Sikhs in the world community. The extent of damage that has been done, may be judged from the opinion poll conducted in 1988 in Montreal by the Tandmar Research Inc. for the Macauliffe Institute of Sikh Studies, Toronto. The findings confirmed the worst fears. Thirty percent of the population in the sample perceived a clear prejudice against Sikhs, the figure being higher than that for the minorities as a whole. In the prejudice scale, Sikhs were behind only Blacks and Haitians. 80% of the respondents knew little or nothing about the Sikhs, and only 18% knew any Sikh. Although in India Sikhs are known to be the most industrious people, only 19% of those surveyed, believed that the Sikhs are hard working members of the community. Over 60% thought they were untrustworthy. Most alarming, however, was the response to the question, "What comes to your mind, when you hear the word Sikh?" Forty three percent used terms such as the following: 'Revolt, conflict, riots in India, trouble makers, bringing trouble here, bombing, terrorism, violence, fanatics, extremists, fighters, warriors, hostile, don't like them, bad impression, shot Gandhi, fighting with Hindus.' Only 14% of them saw Sikhs as suffering from oppression.

2.3 One can only hope that the Montreal sample was not representative of communities in the West. For Sikhs are a flourishing community and are doing very well in most new countries of their adoption, in spite of handicaps. Yet the indications furnished by the survey, should be enough to shake the community out of its indifference and complacency. Steps must be taken to set the record straight and to project a correct picture of the great faith of Sikhism and its valiant followers. This points to the need for an organisation or an institute for an assessment of the world reaction from time to time, for research into and exposition of various aspects of Sikhism, and for dealing effectively with misrepresentations of Sikh doctrines and history coming from various quarters.

### III MISREPRESENTATIONS

3.1 *Old Sikh Literature*: This includes *janam sakhis* or biographical accounts of Guru Nanak, *Cur Bilas* or *Gur Sobha* tradition, *Panth parkash*, *Rahitnamas*, etc. The *janam sakhis* contain serious misrepresentations and damaging interpolations attributable to schisms. associated with Baba Sri Chand (Udasis), Hundal (Niranjanis), Prithvi Chand, DhirMal, Ram Rai, and others. Unfavourable critics have frequently drawn upon these sources, and will continue to do so, unless studies are undertaken to lift the right from the trash that has crept in. The other categories of Sikh literature mentioned above, are also not free from the personal whims of the authors or the motives of those who sponsored the works. .

3.2 *Encyclopaedias*: A survey of entries on Sikhism in 50 major encyclopaedias published in the West, has revealed gross misrepresentations. These include errors of fact as well as misinterpretation of Guru Nanak's system. The Guru has frequently been shown as a disciple of Kabir. Sikhism is invariably presented as a part of Hinduism, and its teachings are confused with the so-called *Sant Mat*. In several cases the authors have failed to see the unity of thought of the Ten Masters, mistakenly referring to Guru Nanak's philosophy as pacifism and that of Guru Gobind Singh as militancy. Another common misinterpretation is the theory of syncretism, which means that Sikhism is only an amalgam of elements drawn from Hinduism and Islam, denying any originality to Guru Nanak. Recognition of Sikhism as a revealed religion is rare. No wonder that the space given to Sikhism is extremely limited as compared with other major faiths of the world. Some of these publications make only a passing reference to Sikhism, while a few do not even mention it.

3.3 *Recent Misrepresentations*: The last two decades have seen a mounting of a regular campaign to misrepresent Sikhism. This was started by a former missionary in India, who has so far produced eight books relating to Sikhism. His thesis revolves around the following main points:

- a. It is misleading to call Guru Nanak the founder of Sikh religion, as he did not originate a new school of thought or set of teachings. What Guru Nanak offers us is the clearest and most highly articulate expression of the *nirguna sampradaya*, the so called Sant tradition of Northern India, a system which he inherited, reworked according to his own

genius and passed on in a form unequalled by any other representative of the tradition. It was the influence of Nath doctrine and practice upon Vaishnava Bhakti which was responsible for the emergence of Sant synthesis.

- b. The ten gurus never preached one set of religious doctrines or system and particularly the Third Guru created new institutions on the old Hindu lines, the very thing Guru Nanak had spurned. From the Sixth Guru onwards the teachings of Guru Nanak were completely given up in favour of a militant pose in response to socio-political situations.
- c. The arming of Panth could not have been the result of any decision by Guru Hargobind, but because of Jat influx in the Sikh fold. . . "The growth of militancy within the Panth must be traced primarily to the impact of Jat cultural patterns and to economic problems which prompted a militant response."
- d. The traditional account about the founding of the Khalsa on the Baisakhi day of the year 1699 (AD) cannot be accepted, as there are "compulsive reasons for scepticism", and "the traditions relating to the period of Guru Gobind Singh must be, in some considerable measure, set aside. The slate must be wiped clean and must not be reinscribed until we have ascertained just what did take place during the eighteenth century."
- e. The Sikh code of discipline, *Rahat Maryada*, and Sikh symbols were evolved during the eighteenth century as a result of gradual growth, though the tradition declares they were definitely settled by a pronouncement of Guru Gobind Singh and were a part of the Baisakhi day proceedings in 1699 (AD).
- f. Though the' Gurus denounced caste system and preached against it, yet they did not seem sincere or serious in removing caste differences.
- g. The succession of the Granth Sahib as Guru of the Sikhs, ending the line of personal gurus on the death of Guru Gobind Singh, was not because of an injunction of Guru Gobind Singh himself but was a subsequent adoption by the Sikhs, who were fighting for their existence, to meet the needs of the Panth for cohesion.
- h. The authenticity of the current version of Guru Granth Sahib which is widely accepted and used by the Sikhs, is open to question, since there are three manuscripts (Birs) available which are not entirely identical.

3.4 This missionary managed to enlist a few associates from India as well as abroad, with whose assistance he has been holding conferences and delivering lectures to propagate the above line of thinking. For want of an organised resistance his claim to being an authority on Sikhism has been taken quite seriously in some quarters in the West. In fact both the Chairs established in Canadian Universities for Sikh Studies with collections from Sikhs are manned by this group.

3.5 There were some very unfortunate developments relating to Sikhs in their home state of Punjab and the rest of India during the eighties. These include the army attack on the Golden Temple, Amritsar, and other sacred Sikh shrines in Punjab, the massacre of thousands of Sikhs in Delhi and other towns of India, and large scale violation of human rights and issue of draconian laws, which withdrew even the right to live. This attracted widespread criticism from the international community. I would normally not have referred to it, but for propagation of disinformation even from academic seats and platforms in the West. A spate of unfounded propaganda has been made against the community. Impression was sought to be created that all Sikhs were terrorists, traitors and undependable, and that they have no separate religious identity. It seems that the efforts did not go in vain, if the results of the Montreal inquiry, mentioned earlier, are any indication.

3.6 Here notice must be taken of the contribution made by a few other movements towards misinterpretation of Sikhism and Sikhs. Arya Samaj was very active towards the end of the nineteenth century. Its leader initiated a relentless tirade of hostile criticism of the Gurus and their teachings. Trumpp's work appeared almost at the same time, and may not be a mere coincidence. Other movements that sometimes draw on the *bani* in the Guru Granth Sahib~ to support their doctrines diametrically opposed to Sikhism, are the Radha Swamis, and the Nirankaris (Delhi based). They are frequently confused with Sikhism by unsuspecting persons. While the former continues to take advantage of the sayings of Gurus in a subtle way, the latter has entered a phase of open hostility towards Sikhism.

#### IV THE RESPONSE

4.1 Upto the end of the 18th century the community was engaged in a bitter struggle for survival, any scholastic activities were more or less out of question. The common man was not even aware of the misrepresentations that had crept in. Even during the

first half of the nineteenth century, when Sikhs ruled the Land of Five rivers, the attention paid to the study of Sikh literature with a view to setting the record straight, was minimal. While the Sikhs during the earlier period, had to abandon their hearths and homes and stay in the jungles to escape the wrath of the hostile Moghal rulers, their shrines passed into the hands of Udasis and other sects who were more Hindus than Sikhs. The British conferred proprietary rights on these Mahants. As a result several Hindu rites had been introduced and even Hindu images had been installed in the Sikh sacred places including the Golden Temple. Patronisation of Mahants who controlled the Sikh shrines, was also aimed at achieving the same purpose. The Arya Samaj movement, mentioned earlier, became very active, and its founder, Swami Daya Nand started his campaign of Shudhi to bring back the Sikhs into the fold of Hinduism. His enthusiasm, however, evoked an unexpected and very severe reaction from Sikh theologians of the time. This appeared as the well organised Singh Sabha Movement in the seventies of the last century. The famous publication of Bhai Kahn Singh, ' *Ham Hindu Nahin Hain* ' shows the gravity of the threat of absorption in Hinduism faced by the Sikh Community, as well as the intensity of the reaction of the Sikh leadership of the time. The other stalwarts engaged in this struggle were Giani Dit Singh and Bhai Vir Singh. This Trio will always rank among the greatest scholars and theologians of Sikhism. They managed to bring about a revival of the real Sikh traditions, and successfully repulsed the attack from outsiders. The Movement also effectively checked the inroads the Christian missionaris had started making with the advent of British rule in the Punjab, besides preparing the community for the struggles that lay ahead. The Singh Sabha survives in name even today, but its influence is too feeble to be felt. But the glorious role it played in the end of the last century, will always be remembered with pride and gratitude.

4.2 *The Akali Movement:* The next response came from the Akali Movement in the twenties of the present century, which after a prolonged struggle, sufferings and sacrifices, succeeded in wresting control of the Sikh shrines from the corrupt Mahants who had introduced several practices against the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. The outcome was the setting up of the statutory body, known as the Shromini Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in 1925 for the control and management of the major shrines of the Sikhs. This is an elected body which has introduced reforms in *gurdwara*

management and has restored the Sikh *maryada*. It carries some missionary responsibilities also, which have received only limited attention. The body is dominated by politicians, and scholars have never had an effective say in its affairs. As a result, research and scholarly pursuits have never been its strong points, and the basic questions of misrepresentation of Sikhs and Sikhism have not been addressed.

4.3 *Recent Interest in Sikh Studies*: This started after the Independence of India, and received impetus, as the Quincentenary of 'Guru Nanak's birth approached. Guru Nanak Dev University was set up at Amritsar in 1969, with expectations of research into and propagation of the mission of Guru Nanak. Departments dealing with religious studies had earlier been set up at the Punjabi University Patiala. Several Sikh and non-Sikh scholars turned their attention to Sikh studies, and the literature that has appeared during the last two decades (Seventies and eighties) is indeed considerable, when compared with the very lean earlier period. However, the misrepresentations of Sikh ideology and Sikh history appear not to have received the attention due to them.

4.4 *University Chairs*: Well-meaning Sikhs collected funds from the Sikh community and succeeded in setting up Chairs at some leading universities abroad with a view to promoting Sikh Studies and projecting a correct image of Sikhism and the Sikhs abroad. Unfortunately their efforts have so far misfired, since the incumbents selected were sometimes non-Sikhs holding derogatory views that make a misrepresentation of the Sikh faith. The views of one incumbent have been briefly stated earlier. For the other Chair (Vancouver) the incumbent selected is a scholar of cultural history. Some of his views may be reproduced here for the benefit of readers:

"If there is any such thing as a key to historical problems, in case of Sikh tradition it is to be found in its social constituency, Sikh religion is first and foremost a peasant faith. Sociologists have spoken of how Islam is an urban religion, Sikhism may be spoken of as a rural religion. When dealing with the beliefs, rituals and practices of the Sikhs --be they religious or political --it is always worthwhile to constantly remind ourselves that we are fundamentally dealing with the peasantry and the world view of this social class has historically always been very different from other social classes. A lot of knotty issues to do with Sikh studies

would become easier to solve, if we stop applying paradigms that have developed out of the study of urban social groups --merchants, middle-class or city workers --and deploy concepts that relate to this day-to-day life of the peasantry.”

The finding in the paper read at Berkley about Sikhs being Sakhi Sarvarias is partly based on the fact that in the 1911 Census less than 3% Sikhs had been mentioned as followers of Sakhi Sarvar as well. He does not say that this was an aberration despite the teachings of the Gurus and of the writings of Sikhs enjoining the worship of God alone. In another paper read at Anaheim in 1989 he characterizes the present Sikh struggle as ‘fundamentalism’ with little political or economic justification.

4.5 It should be obvious from the above illustrations that these Chairs have added a new dimension to the problem of misrepresentation of Sikhism. They have not solved any problem, but they have created new ones. They are turning out material which is dearly damaging to the cause of Sikhism. Instead of improving they are spoiling the image of Sikhs. It may be mentioned here that The Institute of Sikh Studies Chandigarh and a few other Sikh organisations in India offered to discuss some fundamental questions like the originality of Guru Nanak’s religion and the Authenticity of the Kartarpuri Bir with the University. The offer was, however, not accepted. The only conclusion from the sad experience with the University Chairs so far is that these can do more harm than good in institutions over which the community has no control, and where the incumbents have no sympathy for or allegiance to the cause of Sikhism. The new enthusiasm of well wishers of Sikhism to promote Sikh Studies through new University Chairs, therefore, needs to be directed to more productive channels, i.e. for the setting up of independent, institutions strictly under the control of the Sikh Community.

4.6 *Meaningful Response:* Since the agencies mentioned above, did not take any notice of the attacks on Sikhism coming from hostile quarters, misrepresentations continued and the critics flourished. It was only in the late seventies that a group of free lancers, notably Justice Gurdev Singh, S. Daljeet Singh and S. Jagjit Singh took up the challenge and set out to controvert the misleading theses of the Group led by Dr McLeod. They worked first in their individual capacity, but later they organised themselves into ‘The Institute of Sikh Studies’ at Chandigarh. As a

result of their efforts a number of publications have already appeared and all the points raised by McLeod and his group have been adequately dealt with. The following books need special mention in this connection:

- a. 'Sikhism - A Comparative Study of its theology and Mysticism' by Daljeet Singh (1979)
- i. 'Sikh Ideology' by Daljeet Singh (1984)
- ii. 'The Authenticity of Kartarpuri Bir' by Daljeet Singh (1987)
- iii. 'The Sikh Revolution' by Jagjit Singh (1981)
- iv. 'Perspectives on Sikh Studies' by Jagjit Singh (1984)
- v. 'In the Caravan of Revolutions' by Jagjit Singh (1988)
- vi. 'The Sikh Tradition' by Justice Gurdev Singh (Ed.) (1986)
- vii. 'Advanced Studies in Sikhism' by Jasbir Singh Mann & Harbans Singh Saraon (Eds.) (1989)

4.7 *Other Organisations*: Recently a few other organisations have also carried on the academic work on sound footing. The Academy of Sikh Religion and Culture, Patiala, under the leadership of Justice Gurdev Singh is making valuable contributions. The book 'The Sikh Tradition' mentioned above is the outcome of its efforts. The Council of Sikh Affairs Chandigarh has been taking keen interest in the academic field. Outside India, The Sikh Community of North America organised a seminar at Los Angeles in December 1988, and the papers read have already appeared as 'Advanced Studies in Sikhism' mentioned above. The Sikh Council of Education UK, and the newly organised 'The Canadian Institute of Sikh Studies', Toronto, have actively joined in this effort. As a result of collaboration between these societies and The Institute of Sikh Studies Chandigarh, a number of Conferences were organised in UK, Canada and USA in November-December, 1990

#### V. *THE PRESENT RELIGIOUS MOOD IN THE WEST*:

5.1 Since misrepresentations of Sikhism have flourished in the West, the thinking of the communities in Europe and America, is relevant to our problem. The West is by and large Christian in its religious and emotional affiliation. The following opinions expressed by the representatives of the Christian Churches at their world meets and conferences, may be good indicators:

- i. 'The American view was that there are three realities: Christianity, other religions, and secularism, and that



these three realities can either be allies or enemies. It was argued that the Christians had to choose whether they were to ally themselves with other religions against secularism. The Americans, especially the Boston Personalists who were leading the debate at that time, took the view that secularism is a common danger for all religions to fight secularism. European theologians, particularly, Barth, Brunner, and Kramer took a totally different view. They maintained that secularisation, not. secularism, is the primary process: It is a process in which some of the values of Christian faith have been put into a secular framework, bringing about a powerful force which is destroying all old ideas. Hence secularisation is an ally, because it will destroy Hinduism, Islam and other forms of what they considered to be superstition So we should ally ourselves with secularisation and see it as the work of God.”

- ii. ‘That is why at the World Council of Churches it was almost impossible to begin any kind of dialogue. That is one of the things on which I fought many battles, before we finally established a department for dialogue in the World Council. We brought Stanley Samartha from India to head the Department. That was quite a step forward. But then it was ruthlessly defeated in 1975. We had begun very cautiously, with a few meetings in the Middle East with Muslims and Jews. Then we had a multi-religious dialogue. The one in Colombo was the most important one of these, where we had all kinds of religions talking to one another. But there were problems.”
- iii. “One of the books published during that era by Emily Brunner, the Swiss theologian, was called ‘Either/Or. In it Brunner argued that Christian gospel has overcome all its enemies except one, and that is mysticism. Mysticism is an enemy, because it claims that you can have unmediated access to God, and as long as you can have unmediated access, there is no use for Jesus Christ. Therefore, mysticism is the only remaining enemy, and one has to make a clear choice: either the gospel or mysticism.”

5.2 In the West religion is generally studied at three places. One is the forum of Theological Unions and Christian Seminaries. At these places the main study is of the Christian religion. Many of the colleges at the Universities are funded by the Christian community. Thus, normally the obligation of the scholar at these institutions is to uphold the Christian dogma, e.g., at the Oxford University in England the scholar appointed for the study of religion has to give an undertaking for the purpose. The second place is the Department of Comparative Religion in the Universities. Here different religions are studied as traditions. But, to date, whether one likes it or not, the basis of this study is generally what is called the reductionist or mechanical method, i.e., the studies are by and large governed by the methodology and assumptions of evolution, behaviourism or what may be called naturalism or empiricism. The net result is that religions are studied merely as socio-cultural developments, class developments or developing traditions. So much so that many a scholar in this field does not accept the very idea of God or the existence of a spiritual dimension of Reality. Hence arises the use of somewhat derogatory terms like Neo-Sikhism, syncretism, eclectism, evolving Sikh Tradition, more specially in relation to non-Christian religions. The methodology of social sciences colours and governs very greatly the study of religions and their concepts. One finds that many scholars, particularly senior scholars of religion, are perturbed over this development. For this group, as also for the Sikhs, no study of religion is possible, unless the idea of God or the spiritual dimension is accepted as fundamental to it. The third field for the study of religion is the one of social sciences. Here the study gives us what may be called the Anthropologist's view of religion or the Sikh religion, the Sociologist's view of religion, the Historian's view of religion, or the Psychologist's or the Psycho-analyst's view of Religion. Each of these subjects has its own discipline and fundamental assumptions from which it cannot depart, and which form the basis of the study of any religion, like Sikhism or any other religion. It is necessary to impress that such studies can never be studies of religion, as the scholar is primarily governed by the discipline of his own subject. For example, for the Anthropologist, the Behaviourist or Psycho-analyst, values are just 'defence mechanisms' or 'reaction formations'. And for reasons that are obvious he is justified in doing so. For, he cannot violate the very

discipline of his subject in which he is trained. The result is that whereas from the point of view of the religion concerned such studies look vitiated and lop-sided, these are valid from the point of view of the discipline of the social science doing the study.

5.3 As it is, Eastern religions are studied generally under the Departments of South Asia or Eastern Studies. In these Departments religion is not studied as a separate department or discipline. Studies of religion in these organisations are, by and large, anthropological, sociological or historical, none of which are bound by the discipline of religion or accept its premise. Now, according to the Gurus, Sikhism is a revealed religion, and the Bani comprises the Commands of God, and the lives of Gurus have been lived in furtherance of that spiritual direction, involving the creation of a Panth that was anti-caste and anti-class. Secondly, Sikhism is not a tradition, nor can it be studied as such. Sikhism has a recorded scripture authenticated by the Guru himself. To view or study its principles as a socio-political development or as a growth of cultural or class interests or as a tradition is a clear distortion. For, a tradition according to Webster, relates to a system or doctrines that are understood and conveyed orally.

## VI CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Sikhism is a revealed religion, and is uncompromisingly monotheistic. Based upon his mystic experience, Guru Nanak described God as the Ultimate Reality. He is the 'Creator', 'Without Fear or Rancour', 'Beyond Time', 'Unincarnate' and Self-existent'. He is 'All Love', and 'Ocean of Virtues'. God is transcendent as well as immanent in His creation. The world is real and a place for practising righteousness. It is not *mithya* or a place of suffering, as described in some earlier faiths. Life is an opportunity for meeting the Lord. The goal of life is to be a *gunnukh* attuned to the Will of God. The methodology comprises householder's life, earning an honest livelihood and sharing the fruits with others in need, truthful living, altruistic deeds, high morality, full social responsibility, service and sacrifice in the cause of justice, etc. Escapism and parasitism in the garb of asceticism and monasticism are condemned. Sikhism preaches a world view which is positive, life-affirming and progressive.

6.2 Misrepresentation of faiths is common. However, Sikhism seems to have had more than its share, and more often it has been motivated. Misrepresentations abound even in the old Sikh literature, e.g., Janamsakhis, Gurbilas Tradition, Rahitnamas, etc.,

and later in the encyclopaedias published in the West. Sikhism is invariably presented as a part of Hinduism and is confused with the so called Sant Mat or is deemed an amalgam of Nathism and Vaishnavism. Theory of syncretism is popular in some quarters, which assumes that Sikhism is only a combination of elements borrowed from Hinduism and Islam. The Sikh doctrine of Miri- Piri is the most widely misunderstood of all and militancy is ascribed to expediency or social factors.

6.3 Response of the Sikh Community to this onslaught or campaign of misrepresentations and adverse criticism has been rather slow and inadequate. This has encouraged the unsympathetic quarters, and their activities have assumed serious proportions and more subtle forms. Literature has appeared during the last two decades, which seeks to demolish the very foundations of the Sikh faith, distorting the history, misinterpreting the teachings of the Gurus, twisting the doctrines, denying any originality to the founder or claim to religious identity to the Sikhs.

6.4 The Sikh Community has, by and large, been unaware of the damage being done. Mention may be made of some steps taken by Government and the Sikh Community, which could have rectified the situation with any good luck. A couple of Universities were established in India, and some chairs created in India and abroad to carry out studies on Sikh religion and to promote sound research. But the Universities have their own limitations.

6.5 Fortunately there is a silver lining to the dark clouds mentioned above. A few devoted individuals in India and abroad, have taken up the challenge, and have already made a promising start by organising societies committed to this cause. They have brought out a number of books, giving sound scholarly information about Sikhism and its history. In the present climate and age it is essential that reliable academic studies on Sikhism are organised, to provide to readers in India and abroad, fully and properly researched literature.

6.6 The present situation demands concerted and coordinated efforts. Utmost vigilance is necessary to take quick notice of any uninformed or biased attacks on the philosophy, theology, ideology and history of Sikhism. Fundamental research needs to be conducted into the doctrines of Sikhism. An authentic interpretation of the gurbani is required. Basic literature of Sikhism needs to be studied in depth. There are some real or

substantial controversies which need to be resolved. This cannot be done by small societies and their efforts here and there in an unorganised manner. There is an immediate need for Centre(s) of Sikh Studies to take up this responsibility. In fact there is need for a full fledged World Institute of Sikhism, at a central place with sub-campuses at selected places. Alternatively, there may be several Institutes with a Central Coordinating Body. It is difficult to give a detailed blueprint of the Project in this paper or in a preliminary discussion. This task will have to be entrusted to a special committee. Some hints are, however, given on the steps involved, in the last Section of this paper.

6.7 *Conceptual Plan*: A tentative plan of the contemplated campus (assuming a rectangular area of ten acres) is enclosed. The Complex includes:

- Gurdwara and Langar
- Pool and Pavilion
- Class Rooms
- Seminar Rooms
- Classical Languages and Music Rooms
- Auditorium
- Open Air Theatre
- Library
- Staff Quarters
- Students Hostels
- Gymnasium and Changing Rooms
- Suites for Visiting Scholars
- Administrative Block
- Outdoor Sports
- Garden of Retreat
- Plaza

It is for the Sikh Community to turn this 'Castle in the Air' into a reality and to install it on a firm ground.

## VII WORLD INSTITUTE OF SIKHISM

7.1 As indicated earlier, details of the Project will have to be worked out by special committees. However, some of the steps required to be taken, may be mentioned below:

- a) Set up Committee(s) for
  - i. Drawing up a Constitution: Name, Aims and Objects, Activities, Membership, Management Administration, Finances, Status, Coordination, Registration, etc.
  - ii. Selection of Location: Major considerations would be

accessibility, availability of facilities, local support, etc.

iii. Collection of funds.

iv. Publicity.

b) Monitoring: This should be done by a high power Committee with Members drawn from the above committees and other agencies cooperating in the Project. This should also include liaison with similar bodies and institutions in other countries.

7.2 The details should be carefully worked out and given in a comprehensive document. It should, however, be borne in mind that the goal is eventually to create a University level Institute with modern facilities for graduate and post-graduate teaching and advanced research on Sikhism leading to highest academic degrees, besides a nucleus for a World Sikh Missionary Organisation, as a Separate wing. This may have to be achieved in a phased manner, depending upon the physical, financial and technical man-power resources. The purpose of this paper is to stress the need for a Centre or an Institute to perform the functions mentioned above. Once the idea is accepted by the Community, its fulfilment is only a matter of time. And with the traditional enthusiasm of the Sikh Community, there is no doubt, that the proposed Institute will be a reality SOON.

It is gratifying to note that since then a beginning has been made by starting a Centre of Sikh Studies with a library at 2530, Warner Ave, Orange County (Cal.), U.S.A.

APPENDIX I  
PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
OFFICE OF THE PREMIER

December 2, 1990

It gives me great pleasure, as premier of British Columbia, to convey warm greetings and best wishes to everyone gathered at the University of British Columbia today for the Conference on Sikh Culture and Philosophy. May I extend an especially warm welcome to our visitors from outside of British Columbia.

I am certain that your deliberations today will provide an excellent opportunity for you to exchange a wealth of knowledge and ideas which will prove to be of great benefit to all. As you may know, the Government of British Columbia recently announced a multicultural policy that provides a framework for all British Columbians to share in our diverse cultural heritage. Accordingly, your Conference plays an important role as we strive to keep British Columbia as a place where everyone can live and work together in harmony, mutual respect and dignity.

You and your families are to be commended for your numerous achievements and valuable contributions to the prosperity and development of our Province and our nation, and for sharing your rich tradition with us all so generously. On behalf of the people and the Government of British Columbia, may I offer my best wishes for a most successful and rewarding Conferences and every good wish for the days ahead.

Sincerely,

Sd/-  
William N. Vander Zalm  
Premier

Conference on Sikh Culture and Philosophy  
University of British Columbia

## APPENDIX II

### MINISTRY OF STATE, MULTICULTURALISM AND CITIZENSHIP CANADA

December 2, 1990

Canadian Sikh Study & Teaching Society  
P.O Box 67653, Station O  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
V5W 3V1

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to send greetings and best wishes to the Canadian Sikh Study and Teaching Society as you hold your Conference on Sikh Culture and Philosophy.

The belief in community values and service lies at the very heart of the Sikh way of life. As stated in the Guru Granth, 'The man who is lost in selfishness is drowned without water. . .' The work that your Society does in helping young people and in promoting Punjabi culture demonstrates vividly this philosophy of reaching out to one's brothers and sisters.

I note with particular interest your Society's commitment to the cause of peace, interfaith understanding, and general goodwill among Canadians. This particular area of your endeavours clearly serves the cause of unity among the members of Canada's diverse population. We are a country increasingly characterized by cultural and religious variety. Our differences of custom and 'belief, however, need not be divisive if we determine to treat each other fairly, with dignity and respect. In doing so, we not only preserve social harmony, but also enrich the very fabric of Canadian life itself.



May your conference prove truly meaningful and rewarding for both the members of the Sikh community and your invited guests of other faiths.

Sincerely,

Sd/-  
Gerry Weiner

## APPENDIX III

### A REPORT

Although, the Sikhs are small in number but their contribution to world thought and their amazing achievements in the field of social reform have attracted many renowned historians and scholars such as Toynbee, Macauliffe, Pearl Buck and many more to study the historical development and philosophy of Sikhism. Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak Dev five hundred years ago which established new institutions such as Sangat and Pangat in order to eradicate the caste system. Guru Nanak appeared in this world to reveal the new and original thoughts about God and the true way of Divine worship. Sikh Gurus challenged the authority of Brahmins as a high ranking caste and also rejected the policy of monopolising military power by the caste oligarchy. They declared “O Unwise, be not proud of thy caste. For, a myriad errors flow out of this false pride.”

Guru Nanak Dev founded new and original principles to bring about social and political reforms. The other Gurus followed the principles laid down by Guru Nanak and continued their efforts to free the masses from the yoke of slavery under the cruel kings and religious leaders. Guru Nanak associated himself with the lowliest of the low caste. Bhai Gurdas writes that Guru Nanak, made the Dharma perfect by blending the four castes into one.

The Sikh nation also ruled over a huge part of India. Under the Sikh rule all were treated as equal regardless of their caste and creed. There was no exploitation and people had religious, political, and social freedom. The Sikhs always stood for human rights, and their contributions as a saviour of depressed people is very unique in the history of mankind. Even the concept of the Red Cross was also founded by the Sikhs when Guru Gobind Singh appointed Bhai Ghanaya Ji to provide medical aid and food to all the wounded soldiers in the battlefield.

Now, we see the growing number of Sikh organisations and Gurdwaras all over the world, but the way of their preaching is not very effective and also not acceptable to our new generation. Our younger generation is totally neglected and almost ignored. In 1873, when four students of the Mission School at Amritsar proclaimed their intention to accept Christianity, the whole Sikh nation was shaken with the news and those students were approached by the Sikhs not to embrace the other faith. The outcome of this incident was the formation of Singh Sabha. The Sikhs had to confront Arya Samaj and other movements to guard the Sikh faith and its principles. New Sikh educational institutions were established and new Sikh literature was produced to keep the Sikh identity alive. In order to prove the sovereignty of the Sikh doctrine new books were written which were entirely based on Sikh scripture (Sri Guru Granth Sahib).

Even today, we see Hindu styles of worship and practices that are accepted in many Gurdwaras because of their ignorance about Sikh philosophy and Sikh Code of Conduct (Rehat Maryada). On the other hand many quasi-informed scholars write that the Sikh faith is not a new faith and it is just a sect of Hinduism. These scholars appear biased. Their misinterpretations of Sikh history and philosophy are very damaging. Some of these scholars are accepted and appointed in the western Universities to teach Sikh religion. Sikhs need to be made aware of the misrepresentation of their unique and sovereign faith.

Keeping in view the basic needs of our youth and to confront anti-Sikh scholars, the Sikhs of Vancouver formed a society, named "The Canadian Sikh Study and Teaching Society" in 1987. Our resources are limited to cope with the growing needs of the Sikh nation, therefore, we seek the cooperation of an Sikh societies and organisations to propagate our faith very effectively. This society undertook to (1) restore Sikh practices in our Sikh institutions and Gurdwaras (2) edit and publish historical and religious literature and books (3) start magazines and newspapers in English and Panjabi (4) hold youth camps and Seminars, and (5) run Panjabi and Heritage schools for the younger generation.

It was a great opportunity when Sikhs of U.S.A. approached this society to hold an International Sikh Conference in December, 1990. With Guru's grace and the cooperation of the University Sikh students and the Sikhs of B.C, a very successful Conference was held on December 2, 1990 at University of British Columbia.

Prominent Sikh scholars from all over the world participated and presented their research papers. At the present time, Conferences and Seminars: are considered the best source of information where distinguished scholars present their knowledgeable papers with new findings and thoughts. This Conference was the first of its kind and was very successful; more than 600 people participated. The Canadian Sikh Study and Teaching Society is very grateful to the scholars who presented their papers, and is also thankful to the participants who came from all over Canada and the U.S.A. The society is also grateful to the Ministry of Multiculturalism for their cooperation and financial assistance. .

THE CANADIAN SIKH STUDY AND TEACHING SOCIETY.

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PERIODICALS

Asiatic Researches  
 Indian Antiquary (LA)  
 Indian Historical Quarterly (LH.Q.)  
 Journal of Asiatic Society  
 Journal of Asiatic Society Bengal  
 Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society  
 Journal of Bombay Branch Royal Asiatic Society (U.B.B.R.AS.)  
 Journal of Royal Asiatic Society (J.R.A.S.)  
 Journal of Royal Asiatic Society Bengal (J.R.1\..S.B.)  
 Panjab Past and Present (Punjabi University, Patiala)  
 Punjab History Conference Proceedings (Punjabi University, Patiala)  
 BOOKS (ENGLISH)

*Alberuni's India*, 1965. Edited by Sachav. Delhi. S. Chand & Co.  
 Ali, Ameer, 1964. *The Spirit of Islam*, London. Chatus & Windus.  
 Ali, K. 1963. *A Study of Islamic History*, Calcutta. Eureka Book Agency.  
 Ashraf, Kanwar Muhammad. 1970. *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan*.  
 New Delhi. Munshiram Manoharlal  
 A vtar Singh. *Ethics of the Sikhs*; Punjabi University Patiala, India.  
 Banerjee, AC. 1978. *Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh*. New Delhi. Rajesh  
 Publications.  
 Banerjee, AC. 1978. *Guru Nanak and His Times*. Patiala. Punjabi University.  
 Barth, A 1963. *Religions of India*. Varanasi Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series.  
 Bernier, Francis. 1972. *Travels in the Moghul Empire*. Delhi. S. Chand & Co.  
 Bhagat Lachman Singh. 1970. *A Short Sketch of the Life and Works of Guru Gobind  
 Singh*. Patiala. Language Department, Punjab.  
*Bhagvadgita*, Annie Besant, (Translation).  
 Bharatiya. 1965. *The History and Culture of the Indian People*. Bombay, Bharatiya  
 Bhavan.  
 Bougie, Celestin. *Essays of the Caste System*. Translated by D.E. Pacock (1971). Briggs,  
 John. 1966. *History of the Rise of the Mohammadan Power in India*. Calcutta. S.  
 Dey.  
 Briggs, John, 1973. *The Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*. Delhi. Adara-i-Adabiyat. Delhi.  
 Brij Narain. 1957. *A Dutch Chronicle of Mughal India*. Calcutta. Sushil Gupta  
 (India) Ltd.  
*Cambridge History of India*. 1965, Delhi. S. Chand & Co.  
 Correspondence of Persian Records. 1970. National Archives of India.  
 Court, Henry. 1959. *History of the Sikhs*. Calcutta. Sushil Gupta.  
 Cunningham, J.D. 1955. *A History of the Sikhs*. Delhi. S. Chand & Co. Dabistan. Daljeet  
 Singh. 1979. *Sikhism*. New Delhi. Sterling Publishers.  
 Daljeet Singh. *The Sikh Ideology*. Amritsar. Singh Brothers,

- Daljeet Singh. *Essays on Authenticity of Kartarpuri Bir*. Punjabi University, Patiala, India.
- Deussen, P. 1966. *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*. New York. Dover Publications Inc.
- Dhalla, M.N. *Joroastrian Civilization*.
- Dhillon, Gurdarshan Singh - *Researches in Sikh Religion and History*.
- Dubois, Abbe. 1953. *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*. London. Oxford University Press.
- Duff, James Grant. 1971. *History of the Marathas*. New Delhi. Associated Publishing House.
- Durmont Louis. 1972. *Homo Hierarchicus*.
- Dutt, N.K. 1968. *Origin and Growth of Caste in India*. Calcutta. Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay.
- Eliot & Dowson. 1964. *The History of India as Told by its own Historians*. Allahabad, Kitab Mahal.
- Eliot Sir Charles, 1968. *Hinduism and Buddhism*, London. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Elton, G.R. 1965. *Reformation Europe*, Glasgow, FontanajCollins.
- E.R.E. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. Edited by Hastings.
- Fauja Singh. 1976. *Hukamnamas*, Patiala, Punjabi University.
- Forester, George. 1970. *A journey from Bengal to England*. Patiala. Language Department, Punjab.
- Ganda Singh. 1974. *Banda Singh Bahadur*, Patiala.
- Ganda Singh. 1976. *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*. New Delhi. Today and Tomorrow's Printers and Publishers.
- Gh'urys, G.S. 1969, *Caste and Race in India*, Bombay. Popular Prakashan.
- Grewal, J.S. 1972. *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. Amritsar, Guru Nanak Dev University.
- Grewal, J.S., 1970. *Guru Tegh Bahadur and the Persian Chroniclers*. Amritsar, Guru Nanak Dev University.
- Griffin, Lepel. 1967. *Ranjit Singh*. Delhi.5. Chand & Co.
- Gupta Hari Ram. 1952. Delhi. *History of the Sikhs*, V 01. I. Simla. Minerva Book Shop.
- , 1973. *History of Sikh Gurus*. New Delhi. U.e. Kapur & Sons.
- , 1978 *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. n. New Delhi. Munshiram Manoharlal Publications.
- Gurbachan Singh Talib.: 1966. *The Impact of Guru Gobind Singh on Indian Society*. Chandigarh. Guru Gobind Singh Foundation.
- Surdev Singh. *Sikh Tradition*. Academy of Sikh Religion and Culture, Patiala, India.
- Guru Granth Sahib*, Sir. 1964. Trans. in English by Dr. Gopal Singh. Delhi. Gur Das Kapur & Sons.
- Habib, Mohammad. *Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni*. Delhi (Second Edition) S. Chand & Co.
- Habibullah, A.B.M. 1961. *The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*. Allahabad, Central Book Depot.
- Harbans Singh. *Heritage of Sikhs*. Manohar Delhi.
- Hiriyana, M. 1973. *Outline of Indian Philosophy*, Bombay. George Allen & Unwin.
- Hugel, Baron Charles. 1970. *Travels in Kashmir and Punjab*. Patiala. Language Department, Punjab.
- Hutton, J.S. 1963. *Caste in India*. Oxford University Press.
- Ibbeston, Sir Denzil. 1970. *Punjab Castes*. Patiala. Language Department Punjab (rept.)
- Indubhushan Banerjee. 1963. *Evolution of the Khalsa*, Calcutta. A. Mukherjee & Co.

- Irvine, William. 1971. *Later Mughals*. New Delhi. Oriental Books Reprint Corporation.
- Jagjit Singh . *The Sikh Revolution*. Bahri Publication. New Delhi. Sikh Religion and History.
- Jagjit Singh . *Perspectives on Sikh Studies*.
- Jagjit Singh . *In the Caravan of Revolution*.
- Juergensmeyer, M. and N. Gerald Barrier. *Sikh Studies*. 1979. Berkeley. Berkeley Religious Studies Series.
- Kane, P.V. 1974. *History of the Dharma Sastras*. Poona. Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
- Kartar Singh. 1967. *Guru Gobind Singh and the Mughals*. Chandigarh. Guru Gobind Singh Foundation.
- Keene, H.G. 1973. *The Fall of the Moghul Empire*. Delhi. Orient Publishers.
- Keith, A.B. *The Philosophy of the Vedas and the Upanishads*.
- Kethar, S.V. 1979. *History of Caste in India*. Jaipur. Rawat Pub.
- Khushwant Singh . 1963, 1966. *A History of the Sikhs*. Princeton.
- Kosambi, D.D. 1962. *Myth and Reality*. Bombay. Popular Prakashan.
- Kosambi, D.D. 1975. *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*. Bombay. Popular Prakashan.
- LatH, Syed Muhammed. 1891. *History of the Punjab*. Calcutta. Calcutta Central Press Company.
- Macauliffe, Max Arthur. 1963. *The Sikh Religion*. Delhi. S. Chand & Co. (rpt.).
- Malik, Arjan Das, 1975. *An Indian Guerilla War*. New Delhi. Wiley Eastern Ltd.
- Mann, J.S. and H.S. Saraon. *Advanced Studies in Sikhism*; Sikh Community of North America, Irvine, CA, U.S.A.
- Mansukhani, G.S. *The Quintessence of Sikhism*.
- Manu. *The Ordinances of Manu*. Trans. by Aurthur Coke Burnell, New Delhi. Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1971.
- Max Weber. 1960. *The Religions of India*. London. The Free Press, Glencoe.
- Mcleod, W.H. 1975. *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*. London.
- Mcleod, W.H. 1968. *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. Oxford University Press, Mc.'
- Gregor, W.L. 1846. *History of the Sikhs*.
- Narang, Gokal Chand. 1956. *Transformation of Sikhism*. New Delhi. New Book Society of India.
- Niharranjan Ray. 1970. *The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society*. Patiala. Punjabi University.
- Panikkar, K.M. 1955. *Hindu Society at Crossroads*. Bombay. Asia Publishing House.
- Price, Major David. 1974. *Autobiographical Memories of the Emperor Jahangir*, Calcutta. Indian Editions.
- Prinsep, Henry T. 1970. *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*. Patiala. Language Department, Punjab.
- Rhys Davids. 1959. *Buddhist India*, Calcutta, Sushil Gupta.
- Risley, H.H. 1969. *The People of India*. Delhi Oriental Book Reprint Corporation.
- Rose, H.A. 1970. *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Provinces*. Patiala. Language Department Punjab (rpt.).
- Sardesai, G.S. 1958. *New History of the Marathas*. Bombay. Phoenix Publications.
- Sarkar, Jadunath. 1928. *History of Aurangzeb*. Calcutta. M.e. Sarkar & Sons.
- Scott, G.B. 1970. *Religion and Short History of the Sikhs*. Patiala. Language Department Punjab.

- Senart, Emile 1975. *Caste in India*. Delhi.Ess Ess Publications.
- Sharrna Sri Ram. 1972. *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors*. Bombay, Asia Publishing House.
- Sinha, N.K., 1946. *Rise of the Sikh Power*, Calcutta. A. Mukherjee & Co.
- Smith, Vincent A. *Oxford History of India*. Oxford University Press.
- Suri, Sohan Lal. 1972. *Umdat-u/-Tawarikh*, Chandigarh. Punjab Itihas Prakashan.
- Tara Chand. 1963. *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, Allahabad. The Indian Press Publication. .
- Tocqueville De. 1952. *L' Ancient Regime*, Trans. by M.W. Patterson Oxford. Basil Blackwell.
- Tod, James. 1971. *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. New Delhi. K.M.N. Publishers.
- Toynbee, Arnold J., 1971. *A Study of History*. London. Oxford University Press. Wheeler, J.T. and Michael Macmillan. 1956. *European Travellers in India*, Calcutta. Susil Gupta & Sons.
- Wilson, H.H. 1958. *Religious Ser:Js of the Hindu*. Calcutta. Susil Gupta. BOOKS (PUNJABI)
- Asrar-i-Samdi*. Trans. by Janak Singh, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1972.
- Adi Granth, Shabad anukramanika*. Gurcharan Singh, Punjabi University, Patiala. *Bachitar Natak*, Annotated by Pandit Narain Singh. Jowahar Singh Kirpal Singh. Amritsar.
- Batalvi, Ahmed Shah *Tarikh-i-Punjab*. Trans. by Gurbax Singh, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1969.
- Bhai Gurdas Vars*. Annotated by Gyani Hazara Singh Bhai Veer Singh, Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar, 1977.
- Bhangu Rattan Singh. *Prachin Panth Parkash*. Edited by Bhai Veer Singh, Khalsa I Samachar, Amritsar, 1962.
- Ganda Singh. *Amarnama*. Edited by Sikh History Society, Patiala, 1953.
- Hukamnama*. Punjabi University, Patiala. 1967.
- Jassa Singh Ah/uwalia*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1969.
- Gurbilas Chevin Patshahi*: Anon. Bhasha Vibhag'punjab. 1970.
- Gur Sohba, Sri*. Edited by Ganda Singh, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1967.
- Janamsakhi Prampra*. Kirpal Singh. Punjabi University, Patiala, 1969.
- Janamsakhi Walaitwali*. Edited by Bhai Veer Singh Khalsa Samachar, Amritsar.
- Kannahiya Lal. *Tarikh-i"Punjab*. Trans. by Jit Singh Seetal, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1968.
- Karam Singh. *Bahomulle Lekh*. Singh Brothers, Amritsar. 1963.
- Karam Singh. *Historian dee Ithasik Khoj*, Edited by Heera Singh Dard. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee, Amritsar.
- Kesar Singh. Chibber : *BansawaLinamaa Dasan Patshahian Ka*, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 1972.
- Koer Singh. *Gurbilas Patshahi Das*. Punjabi University, Patiala, 1968.
- Mahan Kosh* . Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha. Bhasha Vibhag,Punjab, 1978.
- Mehma Parkash* : Sarup Das Bhalla, Bhasha Vibhag,Punjab, 1978.
- Perchian Seva Das*. Bhasha Vibhag Punjab, 1978.
- Rehatnama*. Edited by Piara Singh Padam, Kala Mandir, Patiala, 1974.
- Sakhi Pothi*. Attar Singh Bhadaur. Khalsa Samachar. Amritsar. 1968.
- Sakhi Pothi, Ma/wa Desh Ratan Di*. Edited by Attar Singh, Khalsa Samachar,Amritsar, 1968.
- Sehje Rachio Kha/sa*, Harinder Singh Mehboob, Khalsa College, Garhdiwala, Hoshiarpur.
- Shabdarath*, Four Volumes, S.G.P.c. Darbar Sahib, Amritsar.



*Shahid Bilas*: Edited by Garja Singh. Punjabi Sahit Academy, Ludhiana, 1971. Sujan Rai Bhandari, *Khalastut Twarikh*. Punjabi University, Patiala. 1971.

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

1. Dr A vtar Singh : Head, Department of Philosophy and Dean Academic Affairs, Punjabi University, Patiala. Author of 'Ethics of the Sikhs: and many other papers.
2. Daljeet Singh : Author of 'Sikhism - A Comparative Study of Its Theology', 'The Sikh Ideology " and' Authenticity of Kartarpuri Bir'; Delivered Guru Nanak Dev Memorial Lectures, and Guru Tegh Bahadur Commemorative Lectures at Punjabi University, Patiala; contributor of several papers on Sikhism.
3. Dr Gobind Singh Mansukhani : Author of 'Introduction to Sikhism', 'Guru Gobind Singh', 'Life of.Guru Nanak Dev', and seventeen other books on Sikhism.
4. Gurbakhsh Singh : formerly Dean Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana; author of 'The Sikh Faith' and several papers on Sikh Religion.
5. Dr Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon : Reader in History, Panjab University, Chandigarh, author of ' Researches in Sikh Religion and History', and several research papers on Sikh History: Specialist in The Singh Sabha period.
6. Dr Gurnam Kaur: Reader, Department of Guru Granth Sahib Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala; author of Reason and Revelation in Guru Granth Sahib' , and several papers on Sikh Religion.
7. Prof. Gurtej Singh : A distinguished scholar of Sikh Religion; National Professor of Sikhism; author of several papers on Sikh Religion and History.
8. Dr Himadri Banerjee : Department of History, Rabindra Bharati Univ~rsity, Calcutta. Author of several historical papers on Sikh Religion.
9. Jagjit Singh : Author of 'Sikh Revolution', 'Perspective on Sikh Studies', 'In the Caravan of Revolutions', and 'Ghadar Party di Lehar', besides other publications and papers on Sikh Studies.

10. Dr Kharak Singh Mann : Secretary, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh. Author of several research papers on Sikh Studies. Editor, Abstracts of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, and . Fundamental Issues in Sikh Studies.'
11. Dr Madanjit Kaur : Head, Department of Guru Nanak Studies, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar; author of 'Golden Temple' and several research papers on Sikhism; Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Sikh Studies, GND University, Amritsar.
12. Dr Noel Q. King: Professor of Religion, University of California, Santa Cruz, USA; author of several books on Religion, and papers on Sikh Studies.
13. Dr Surinder Singh Kohli : Formerly Dean of University Instructions, Panjab University, Chandigarh; Director Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi; author of six dozen books on Sikhism.
14. Dr James R. Lewis : Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina, USA; author of several papers on Sikh Studies.
15. Dr Jim Lotz : Sociologist and writer from Halifax, Canada; closely involved in studies on Multicultural Developments in Canada.
16. Dr RanbirSingh Sandhu : A distinguished scientist and Head, Department of Engineering Studies, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. Also heads Sikh Religious and Educational Trust, Dublin, Ohio.
17. S. Iqbal Singh Sara : A senior Barrister-at-Law and a leading citizen of Vancouver; a keen scholar of Sikh Studies.